FEARSCAPE PRESENTS

A DARK INTERLUDE

O'SULLIVAN ◆ MUTTI & KOWALSKI ◆ POPOV ◆ ANDWORLD

I am contractually obliged by my "publisher" to inform prospective readers that the book before them is a sequel to the 2018 graphic novel, Fearscape

It isn't, of course. The entire premise of A Dark Interlude is that sequel culture is destroying what little creativity still exists within modern society. Only a complete midwit would tell such a story in a genuine sequel!

-Henry Henry

A LOATHESOME SEQUEL,

VAULT

OF SORTS.

VAULT A DARK INTERLUDE O'SULLIVAN MUTTI & KOWALSKI POPOV ANDWORLD 2

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O'SULLIVAN ◆ MUTTI & KOWALSKI ◆ POPOV ◆ ANDWORLD

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FEARSCAPE

A DARK INTERLUDE

CHAPTER ONE

HENRY HENRY

I want to address the claims made about me to the New York Times by Jill Proctor.

Her statements are entirely correct. I am a plagiarist and an abuser.

I stole the script for my debut novel, *Terror Forming,* from Jill's father, Arthur Proctor. Arthur was my mentor and friend. With his declining mental health due to old age, I thought the only way the work would see the light of day was if I polished it up (something he was incapable of doing, and not just because I stole it) and published it under my name.

I see now that my actions were wrong. I take ownership of them. And I apologize. Not just to Jill and Arthur, but to all of my readers. I have let you down.

I would also like to take this moment to apologize for how I behaved once my plagiaristic crimes were uncovered. Specifically: murdering Arthur, attempting to murder Jill, and attempting to murder Jill's infant child. After a great deal of reflection and legal counsel, I now accept that such actions cannot be considered "self-defense". (Regardless of the ***complicated history*** Arthur and I share.) I take ownership of this mistake. The attempted (some might argue, partially successful) familiaricide was entirely my fault. I take full responsibility for murdering Arthur. I promise to treat this as a learning experience and do better in future.

In an attempt to do better (and due to a court order) I have spent the last eighteen months as an inpatient at Scriblerus Mental Health Hospital. Upon my arrival here, my doctor encouraged me to write a novel. (My doctor believed that I could come to terms with my plagiaristic crimes by penning something original.) Thinking it little more than glorified wheel spinning, I wrote a brief epilogue to *Terror Forming;* indulging in every first-draft-creative-whim without a moment's thought towards self-restraint, editorial feedback, or aesthetic merit. I had no intention of ever publishing these writings and entered into therapy in the best possible faith. Unfortunately, in a moment of excitement at my newfound lucidity and personal growth, I posted the manuscript to my publishers, Hermann & Humbert. Who, at the time, I believed

were my friends and would be excited to see my progress.

Hermann & Humbert are now insisting on publishing my therapy writings, which they have packaged into a novel entitled *“Terror Forming II”.* (They lack the common courtesy to hide the book’s sequel nature with an entirely new title.) I have no intention of contributing towards the perpetual adolescence of modern quasi-literates by feeding them a *sequel*. (And the inevitable cultivation of its malformed, juvenile offspring: *the franchise shared universe).* To that end, and to spare the Proctor family any more upset due to my actions, I have written to Hermann & Humbert, forbidding them from publishing *Terror Forming II.*

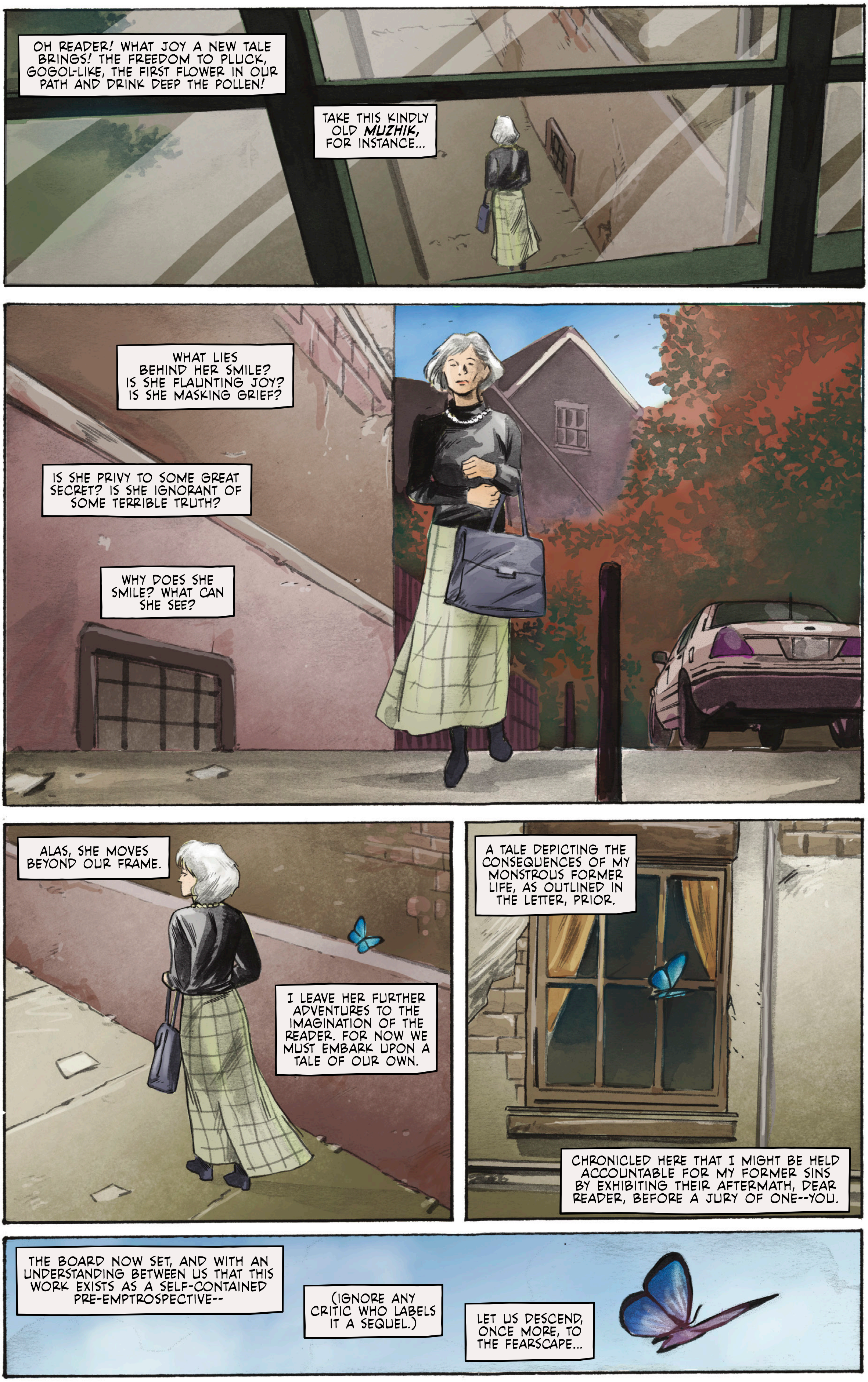
With the aforementioned now settled, a brief message to my rapidly growing online fan base: while I appreciate your support in my time of healing, I ask that you stop harassing Jill Proctor. She has been through enough. If you intend to attend her gallery exhibit at the 13th Mann Street Galleria between the hours of 8-10pm Monday-through-Friday you should do so out of a genuine interest in her work—and not just because you wish to vandalize her paintings due to their lack of protection against any kind of corrosive acid.

As I close this letter, I must now look to the future. My doctor at Scriblerus suggested I take a step back from the public arena; that I couch this retreat as a means of *“being quiet, listening more than I speak, and respecting other voices that matter far more than my own.”* But to hide in the shadows, after having written this letter is to demand the final word; to deny Jill, and others like her, the opportunity of discourse that they are owed. If I am to fully own my mistakes, I must be present for the consequences of them. Otherwise, I would be just another narcissistic writer, suffering Dunning-Kruger, attempting to gaslight a faceless audience he has always considered beneath him.

To all living readers who have lent this dead author their eyes for the duration of this letter—thank you. As ever, I shall not exist if you do not imagine me. I remain your humblest of narrators; ever listening, learning, and striving towards being a better human being.

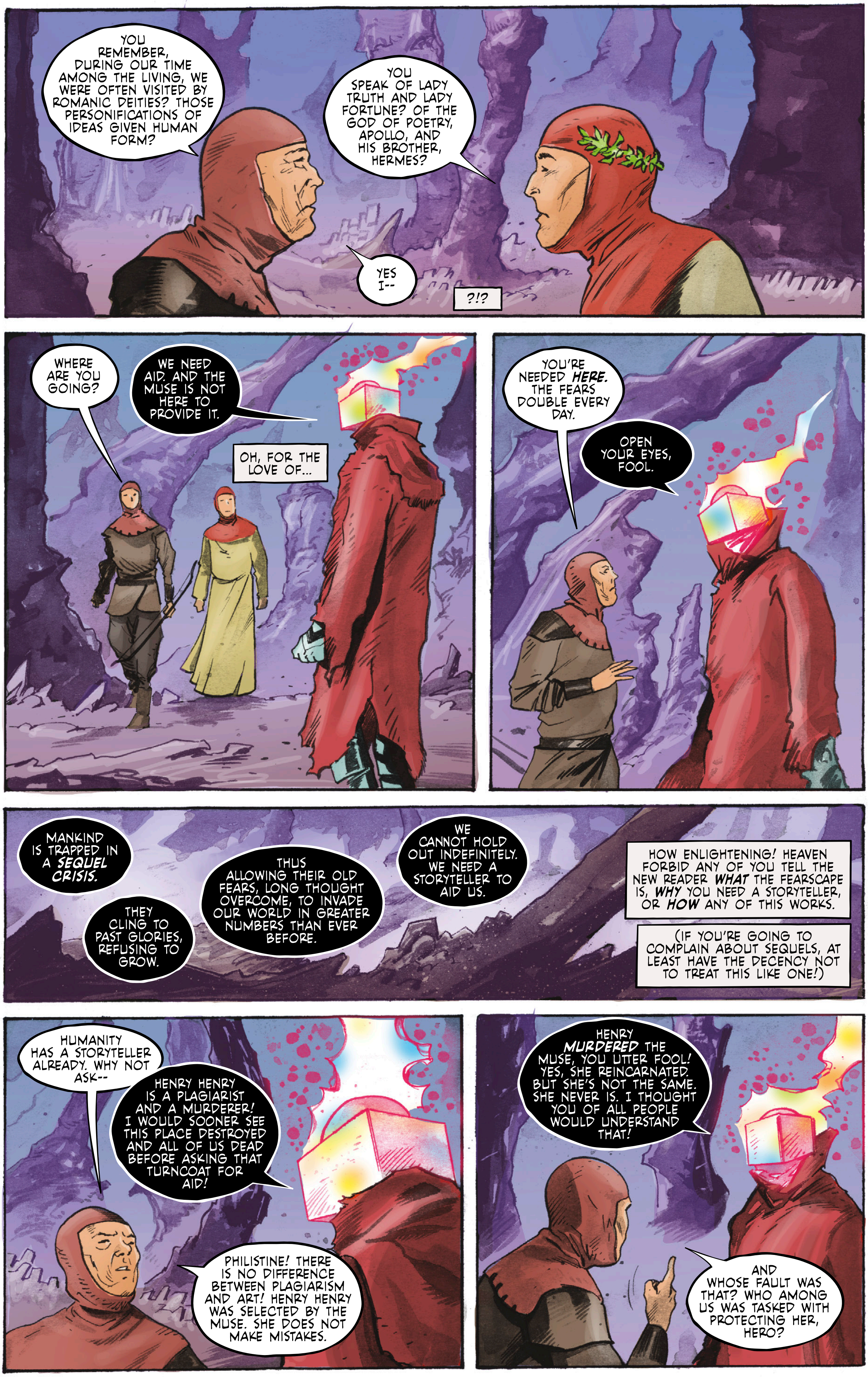
Henry Henry

(November 18th, 202-)


OH READER! WHAT JOY A NEW TALE BRINGS! THE FREEDOM TO PLUCK, GOGOL-LIKE, THE FIRST FLOWER IN OUR PATH AND DRINK DEEP THE POLLEN!
TAKE THIS KINDLY OLD MUZHIK, FOR INSTANCE...
WHAT LIES BEHIND HER SMILE? IS SHE FLAUNTING JOY? IS SHE MASKING GRIEF?
IS SHE PRIVY TO SOME GREAT SECRET? IS SHE IGNORANT OF SOME TERRIBLE TRUTH?
WHY DOES SHE SMILE? WHAT CAN SHE SEE?
ALAS, SHE MOVES BEYOND OUR FRAME.
I LEAVE HER FURTHER ADVENTURES TO THE IMAGINATION OF THE READER. FOR NOW WE MUST EMBARK UPON A TALE OF OUR OWN.
A TALE DEPICTING THE CONSEQUENCES OF MY MONSTROUS FORMER LIFE, AS OUTLINED IN THE LETTER, PRIOR.
CHRONICLED HERE THAT I MIGHT BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR MY FORMER SINS BY EXHIBITING THEIR AFTERMATH, DEAR READER, BEFORE A JURY OF ONE--YOU.
THE BOARD NOW SET, AND WITH AN UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN US THAT THIS WORK EXISTS AS A SELF-CONTAINED PRE-EMPTROSPECTIVE--
(IGNORE ANY CRITIC WHO LABELS IT A SEQUEL.)
LET US DESCEND, ONCE MORE, TO THE FEARSCAPE...

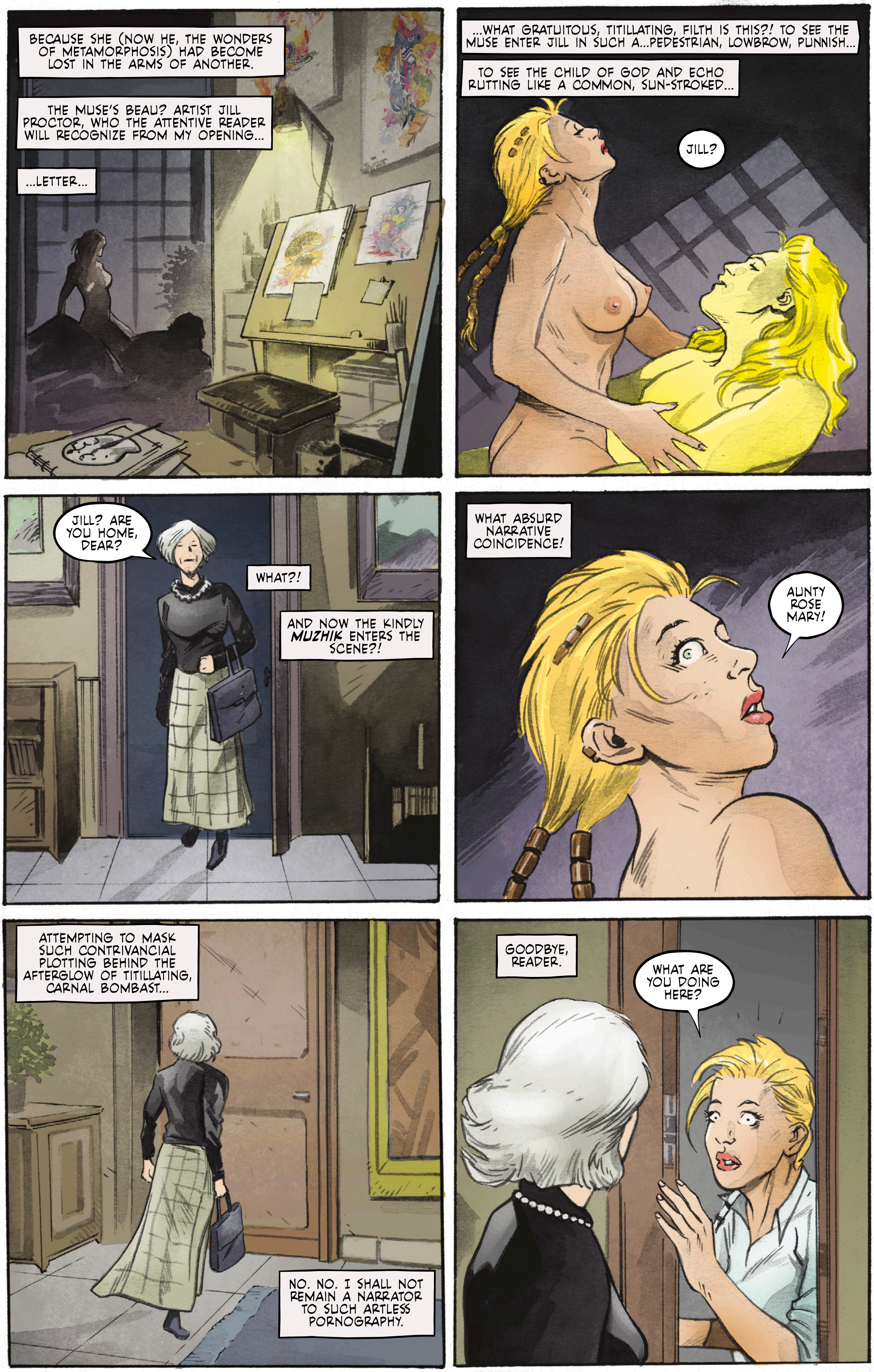
'DESCEND ONCE MORE?!' CRIES THE NEW READER, 'HOW CAN THIS WORK STAND ALONE IF WE ARE RETURNING TO THE LOCALE OF A PRIOR ADVENTURE?! YOUR FOREWARD FOREWARNED NO DETAILS OF THIS "FEARSCAPE"!'
I TRUST THE LEARNED READER WILL UNDERSTAND IT IS NOT IN A PATIENT'S BEST INTERESTS, WHEN HE IS UNDER PSYCHIATRIC OBSERVATION, TO SPEAK OF MAGICAL REALMS POPULATED BY MONSTERS.
REGARDLESS, YOU NEEDN'T WORRY ABOUT THE FINER WORKINGS OF THE FANTASY WORLD BEFORE YOU. ANY REALM ENTITLED "FEARSCAPE" WILL INEVITABLY BE INHABITED BY AMBASSADORIAL PROXIES GARGLING EXPOSITION.
GET UP AND FIGHT, HERO!
THE FEARS ARE ALMOST UPON US!
DAMN YOU, FLORENTINE. HOLD YOUR GROUND. I NEED ONLY...
...A MOMENT...
...LONGER...

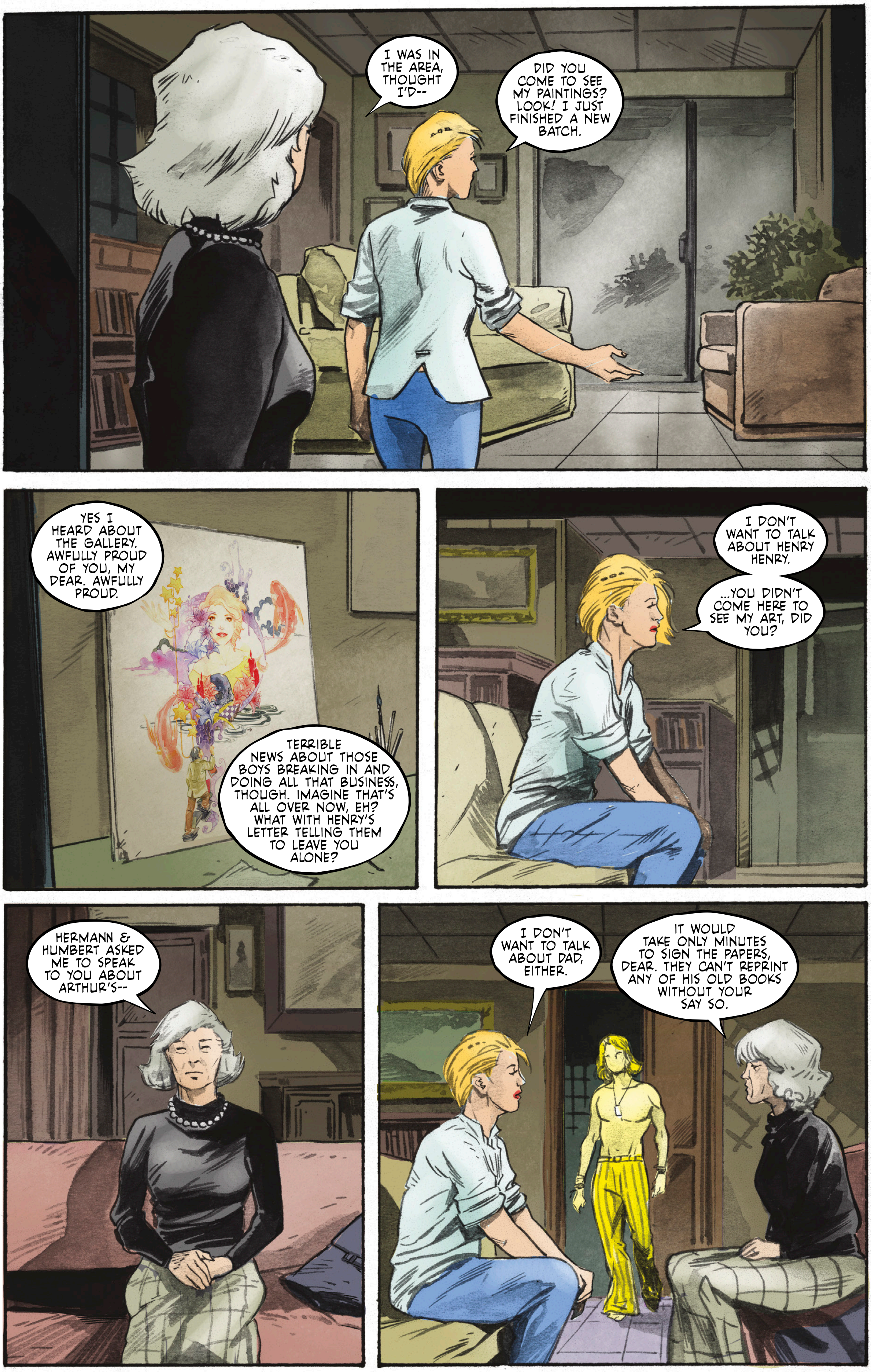
PETRARCH? IS THAT YOU?
AS IF ON CUE! A CIPHER, LACKING KNOWLEDGE OF THE *FEARSCAPE,* WHO NOW REQUIRES ALL-ENCOMPASSING ELUCIDATION OF THIS UNKNOWN REALM. HOW NARRATIVELY FORTUITOUS!
IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, BOCCACCIO.
AND YOU, ***MAGISTER.*** BUT, TELL ME, WHAT HELLISH PLANE HAVE YOU SUMMONED ME TO?
DRUM ROLL, PLEASE...

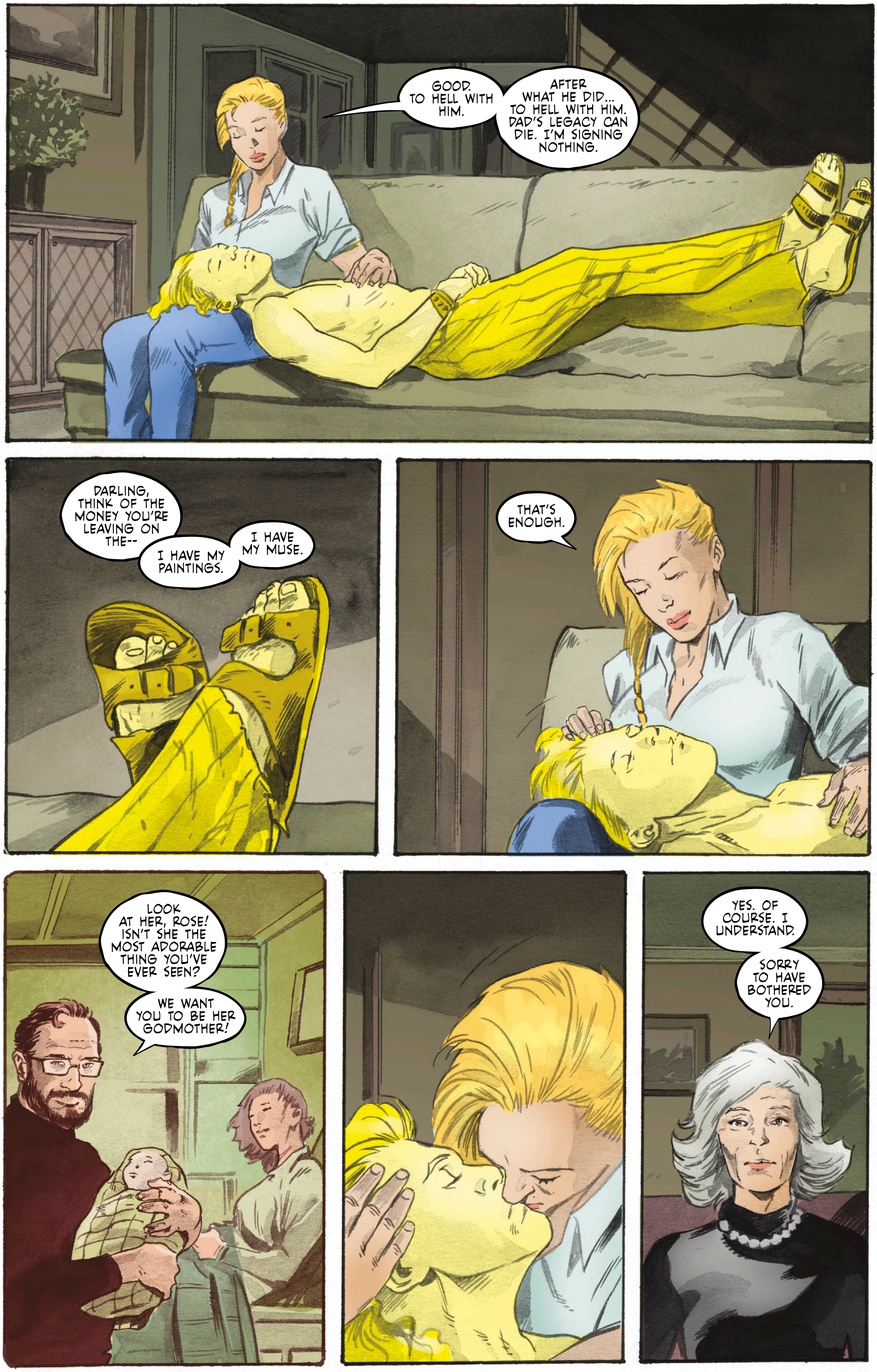

YOU REMEMBER, DURING OUR TIME AMONG THE LIVING, WE WERE OFTEN VISITED BY ROMANIC DEITIES? THOSE PERSONIFICATIONS OF IDEAS GIVEN HUMAN FORM?
YOU SPEAK OF LADY TRUTH AND LADY FORTUNE? OF THE GOD OF POETRY, APOLLO, AND HIS BROTHER, HERMES?
YES I--
?!?
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
WE NEED AID. AND THE MUSE IS NOT HERE TO PROVIDE IT.
OH, FOR THE LOVE OF...
YOU'RE NEEDED HERE. THE FEARS DOUBLE EVERY DAY.
OPEN YOUR EYES, FOOL.
MANKIND IS TRAPPED IN A SEQUEL CRISIS.
THEY CLING TO PAST GLORIES, REFUSING TO GROW.
THUS ALLOWING THEIR OLD FEARS, LONG THOUGHT OVERCOME, TO INVADE OUR WORLD IN GREATER NUMBERS THAN EVER BEFORE.
WE CANNOT HOLD OUT INDEFINITELY. WE NEED A STORYTELLER TO AID US.
HOW ENLIGHTENING! HEAVEN FORBID ANY OF YOU TELL THE NEW READER WHAT THE FEARSCAPE IS, WHY YOU NEED A STORYTELLER, OR HOW ANY OF THIS WORKS.
(IF YOU'RE GOING TO COMPLAIN ABOUT SEQUELS, AT LEAST HAVE THE DECENCY NOT TO TREAT THIS LIKE ONE!)
HUMANITY HAS A STORYTELLER ALREADY. WHY NOT ASK--
HENRY HENRY IS A PLAGIARIST AND A MURDERER! I WOULD SOONER SEE THIS PLACE DESTROYED AND ALL OF US DEAD BEFORE ASKING THAT TURNCOAT FOR AID!
PHILISTINE! THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PLAGIARISM AND ART! HENRY HENRY WAS SELECTED BY THE MUSE. SHE DOES NOT MAKE MISTAKES.
HENRY MURDERED THE MUSE, YOU UTTER FOOL! YES, SHE REINCARNATED. BUT SHE'S NOT THE SAME. SHE NEVER IS. I THOUGHT YOU OF ALL PEOPLE WOULD UNDERSTAND THAT!
AND WHOSE FAULT WAS THAT? WHO AMONG US WAS TASKED WITH PROTECTING HER, HERO?

WHERE WILL YOU GO?
THE DARK CELLS.
NO! SURELY EVEN HENRY HENRY IS PREFERABLE TO--
HE ISN'T.
I SHALL RETURN.
TEACH BOCCACCIO TO PROTECT THE GATEWAY. DO NOT PERMIT ANY FEARS TO PASS INTO THE WORLD OF MAN.
THE PROBLEM WITH REALITY, DEAR READER, IS THAT, WHILE IT IS OFTEN HOME TO ACCIDENTAL COINCIDENCE, IT IS ALWAYS HOSTILE TOWARDS NARRATIVE INTENT.
THUS, I WILL NOW REVEAL WHAT OUR OPENING TROUPE WERE EITHER UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO...

THE FEARSCAPE IS A WORLD BEYOND OUR OWN, POPULATED BY THE SENTIENT PERSONIFICATIONS OF THE THINGS WE FEAR MOST.
THEY ARE LED BY A FEAR WITH THE TITLE ***THE GREATEST OF ALL FEARS.***
(THE BEARER OF THIS TITLE HAS CHANGED OVER THE CENTURIES -- AS HUMANITY'S CHIEF FEAR SHIFTS BETWEEN FAMINE, WAR, PLAGUE AND A DOZEN OTHER WORLD-DEVOURING EVILS.)
OPPOSING THE FEARS IS ***THE MUSE*** OF GREEK MYTH WHO, ONCE PER GENERATION, TRAVELS TO OUR WORLD TO FIND OUR GREATEST STORYTELLER.
ONCE FOUND...
...THE STORYTELLER TRAVELS TO THE FEARSCAPE, SLAYS THE GREATEST OF ALL FEARS...
...AND FROM THAT BATTLE DRAWS INSPIRATION TO CRAFT THE GREATEST WORK OF ART OF HIS GENERATION.
USHERING IN A NEW GOLDEN AGE FOR HUMANITY.
BUT SUCH GOLDEN AGES ARE BRIEF -- FOR NEW FEARS ARE FOREVER FORGED IN THE HEART OF MAN.
AND, BEFORE LONG, ANOTHER GREATEST OF ALL FEARS WILL EMERGE, AND THE WORLD SHALL FIND ITSELF NEEDING A STORYTELLER ONCE MORE.
YOU SEE NOW THE PROBLEM WITH MY INCARCERATION? I WAS THEIR STORYTELLER, YET I WAS BOTH UNABLE (AND, IT SEEMS, UNWELCOME) TO AID THEM.
SO WHY DID THEY NOT ASK THEIR ABSENT LEADER, THE MUSE, FOR AID? WHY WAS SHE LOST TO THEM?

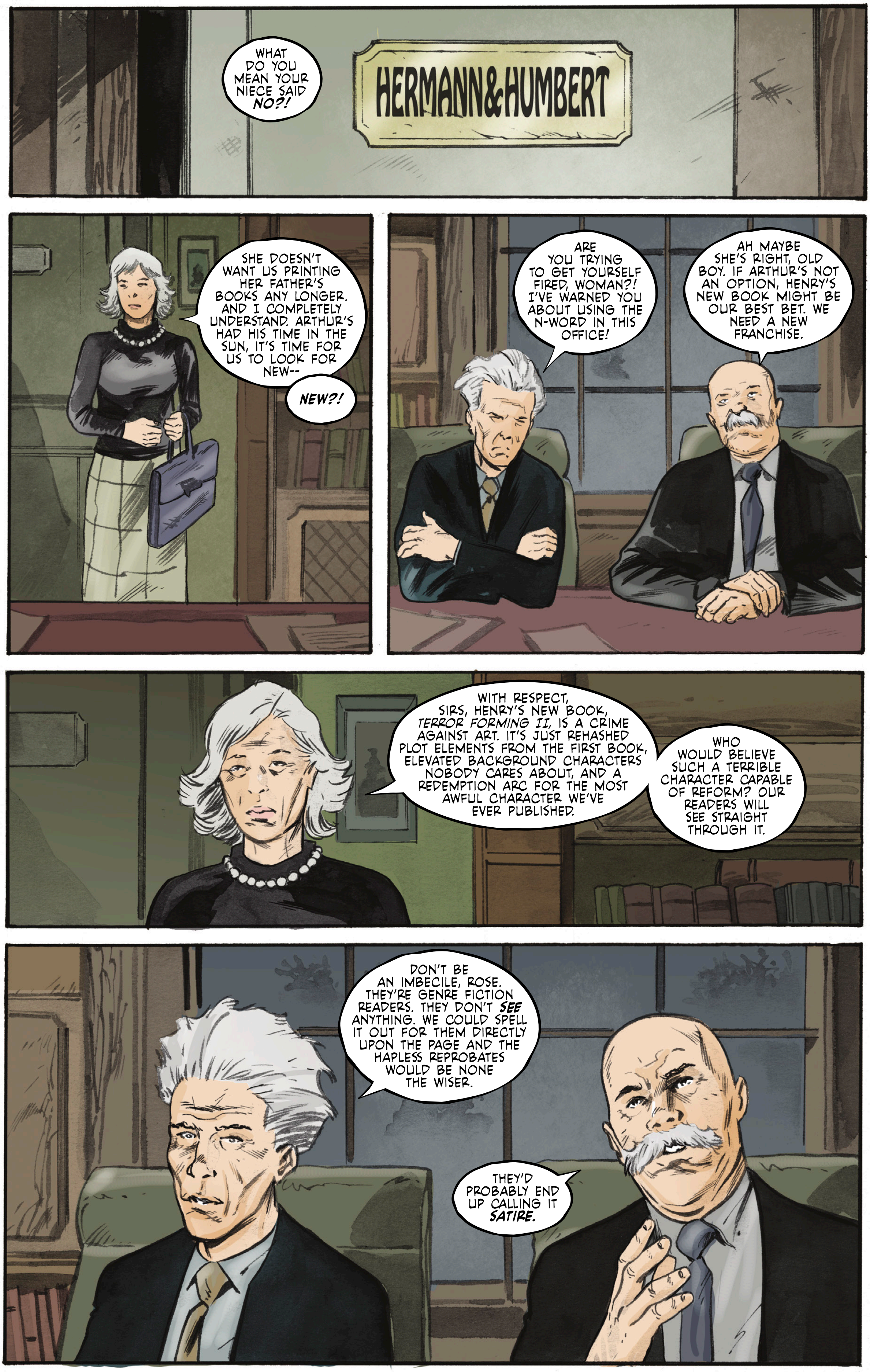

BECAUSE SHE (NOW HE, THE WONDERS OF METAMORPHOSIS) HAD BECOME LOST IN THE ARMS OF ANOTHER.
THE MUSE'S BEAU? ARTIST JILL PROCTOR, WHO THE ATTENTIVE READER WILL RECOGNIZE FROM MY OPENING...
...LETTER...
...WHAT GRATUITOUS, TITILLATING, FILTH IS THIS?! TO SEE THE MUSE ENTER JILL IN SUCH A...PEDESTRIAN, LOWBROW, PUNNISH...
TO SEE THE CHILD OF GOD AND ECHO RUTTING LIKE A COMMON, SUN-STROKED...
JILL?
JILL? ARE YOU HOME, DEAR?
WHAT?!
AND NOW THE KINDLY *MUZHIK* ENTERS THE SCENE?!
WHAT ABSURD NARRATIVE COINCIDENCE!
AUNTY ROSE MARY!
ATTEMPTING TO MASK SUCH CONTRIVANCIAL PLOTTING BEHIND THE AFTERGLOW OF TITILLATING, CARNAL BOMBAST...
NO. NO. I SHALL NOT REMAIN A NARRATOR TO SUCH ARTLESS PORNOGRAPHY.
GOODBYE, READER.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

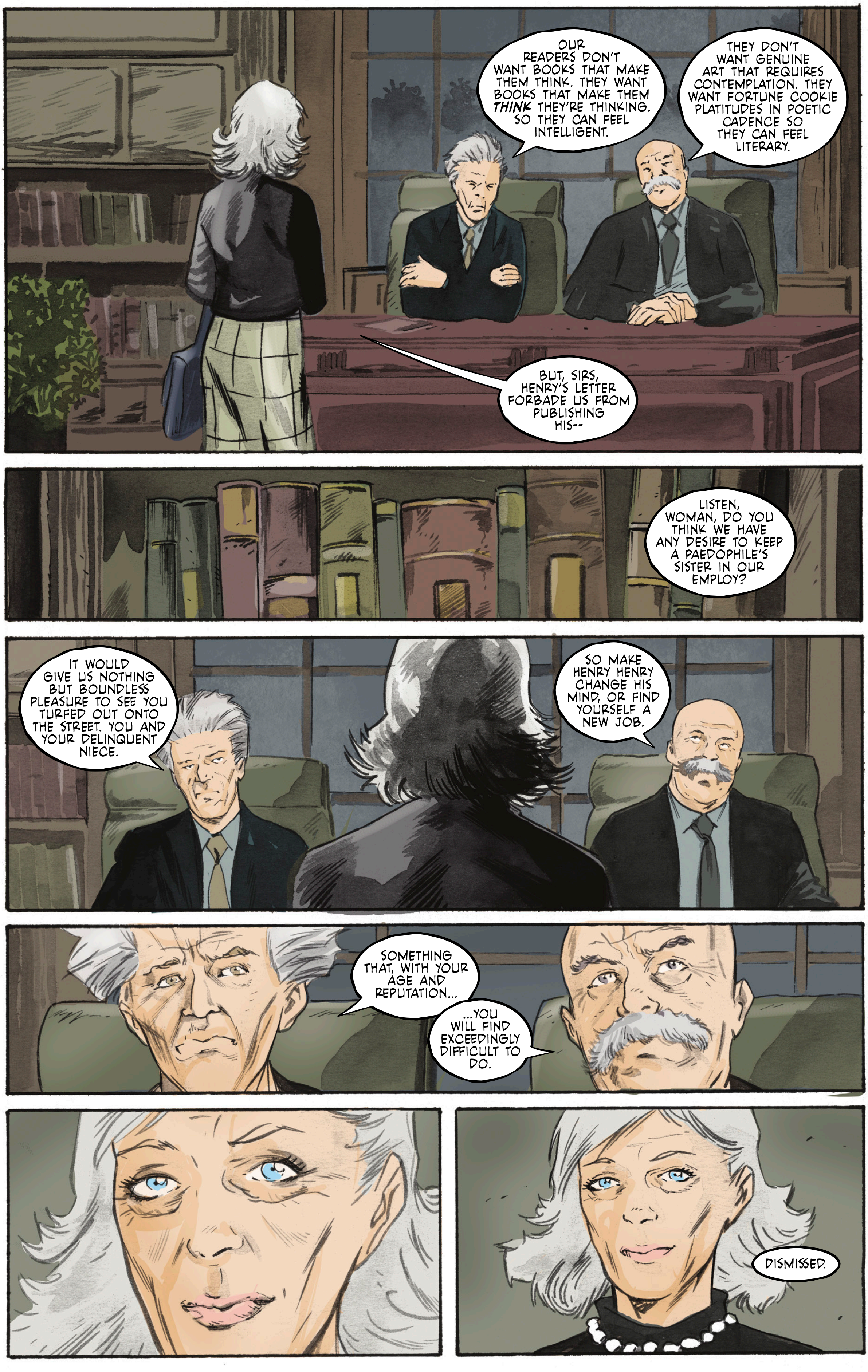

I WAS IN THE AREA, THOUGHT I'D--
DID YOU COME TO SEE MY PAINTINGS? LOOK! I JUST FINISHED A NEW BATCH.
YES I HEARD ABOUT THE GALLERY. AWFULLY PROUD OF YOU, MY DEAR. AWFULLY PROUD.
TERRIBLE NEWS ABOUT THOSE BOYS BREAKING IN AND DOING ALL THAT BUSINESS, THOUGH. IMAGINE THAT'S ALL OVER NOW, EH? WHAT WITH HENRY'S LETTER TELLING THEM TO LEAVE YOU ALONE?
I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT HENRY HENRY.
...YOU DIDN'T COME HERE TO SEE MY ART, DID YOU?
HERMANN & HUMBERT ASKED ME TO SPEAK TO YOU ABOUT ARTHUR'S--
I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT DAD, EITHER.
IT WOULD TAKE ONLY MINUTES TO SIGN THE PAPERS, DEAR. THEY CAN'T REPRINT ANY OF HIS OLD BOOKS WITHOUT YOUR SAY SO.

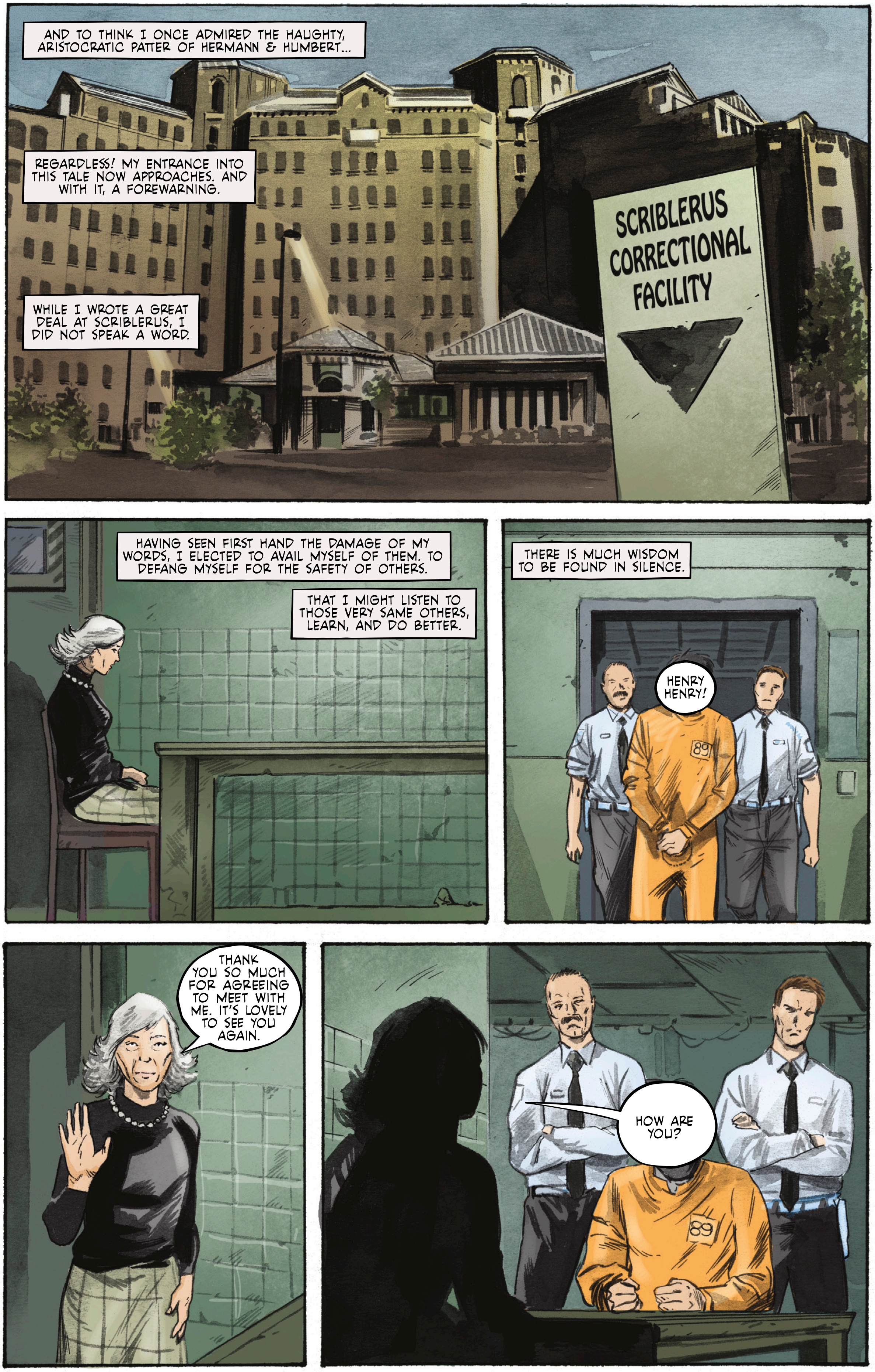

GOOD. TO HELL WITH HIM.
AFTER WHAT HE DID... TO HELL WITH HIM. DAD'S LEGACY CAN DIE. I'M SIGNING NOTHING.
DARLING, THINK OF THE MONEY YOU'RE LEAVING ON THE--
I HAVE MY PAINTINGS.
I HAVE MY MUSE.
THAT'S ENOUGH.
LOOK AT HER, ROSE! ISN'T SHE THE MOST ADORABLE THING YOU'VE EVER SEEN?
WE WANT YOU TO BE HER GODMOTHER!
YES. OF COURSE. I UNDERSTAND.
SORRY TO HAVE BOTHERED YOU.

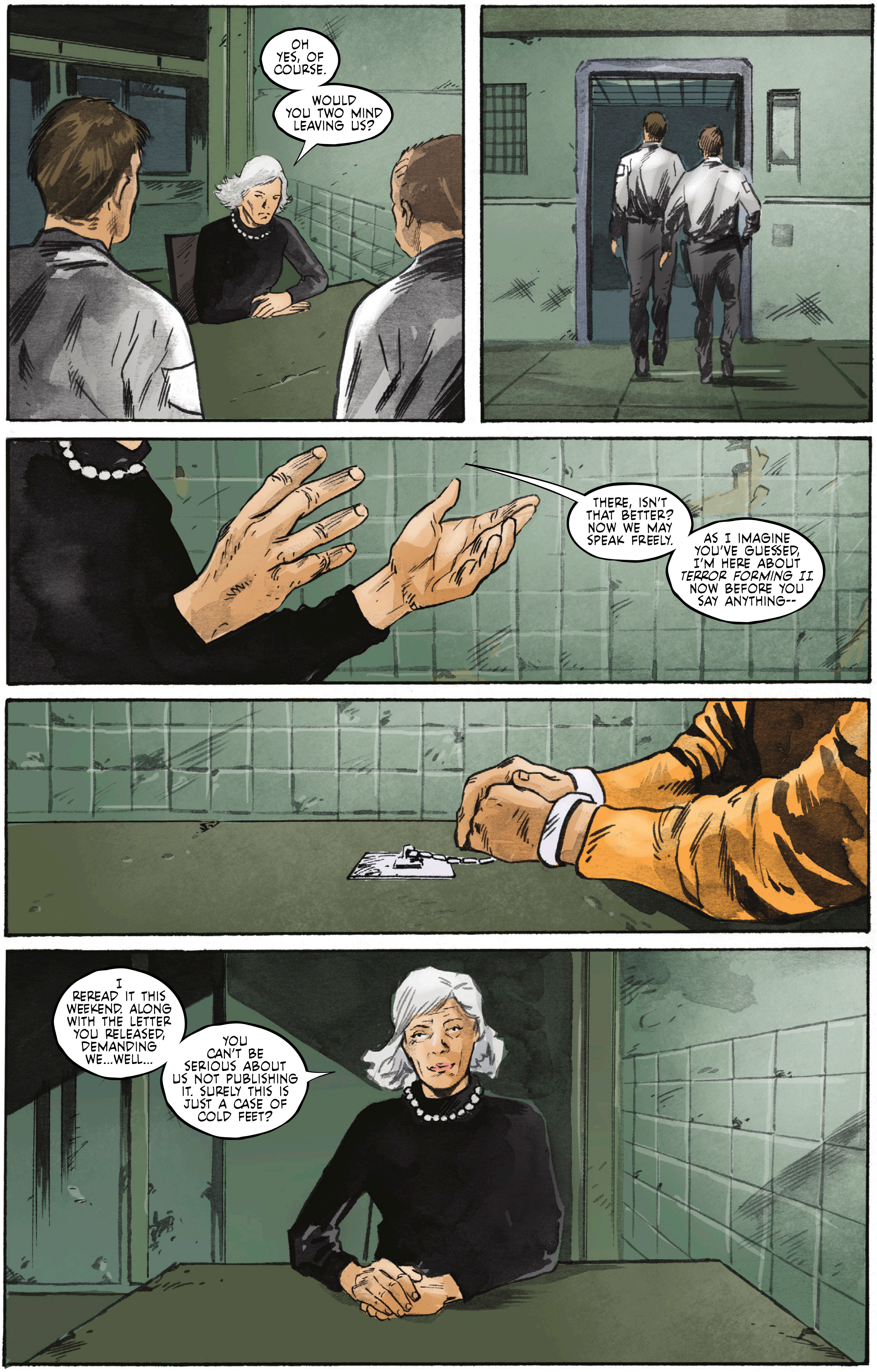
READER, FORGIVE MY TANTRUM.
IT MAY SOUND STRANGE, GIVEN THAT IN A FORMER LIFE I MURDERED ONE AND ATTEMPTED TO MURDER THE OTHER, BUT I COULDN'T HELP BUT FEEL PATERNAL TOWARDS THE MUSE AND JILL.
WHILE THEY ARE AUTONOMOUS INDIVIDUALS WITH RICH INTERIOR LIVES, THEY ARE ALSO CHARACTERS IN A STORY I AM NARRATING.
IT FELT AS IF I HAD WALKED IN ON TWO OF MY CHILDREN GOING AT IT WITH EACH OTHER.
AND IT WAS NOT SO MUCH A GENERAL DISGUST TOWARDS INCEST THAT ALARMED ME, BUT RATHER MY OWN JEALOUSY AT BEING LEFT OUT. AT BEING MADE THE OUTSIDER TO A COUPLING I WAS THE PROGENITOR OF.
AS I PONDERED THIS, I FELT THE GAP BETWEEN ARTHUR AND ME LESSEN.
HAD MY TORMENTOR BECOME MY PEER?
DID THESE SAME THOUGHTS THAT PLAGUE ME ONCE PLAGUE HIM?
I HOPE NOT.
IT'S EASIER TO HATE A MONSTER.
SO...

...FINALLY FOUND SOME SPACE FOR ME IN THAT HEAD OF YOURS?
I NEED YOUR HELP.
'TWAS EVER THUS.
OUR CURRENT STORYTELLER, A TREACHEROUS MALCONTENT, HAS FOUND HIMSELF INDISPOSED. AND, WITHOUT HIM, THE FEARS GROW UNMANAGEABLE.
FEARS CANNOT BE MANAGED. THAT IS ONE THING YOUR KIND NEVER UNDERSTOOD. THIS 'FEARSCAPE' IS NOTHING MORE THAN THE FAILED EXPERIMENT OF A BORED GOD.
OR SOMETHING FAR DARKER.
I'M OFFERING YOU A CHANCE TO RETURN TO THE ROLE OF HUMANITY'S STORYTELLER!
WILL CANNOT BECOME WILL.
I DO NOT FOLLOW?
OF COURSE, YOU DO. IT'S ALL YOUR KIND EVER DOES. AND NOW'S THE TIME!
COME, LET US LEAVE THESE DANK CELLS.
MY LIBRARY AWAITS!

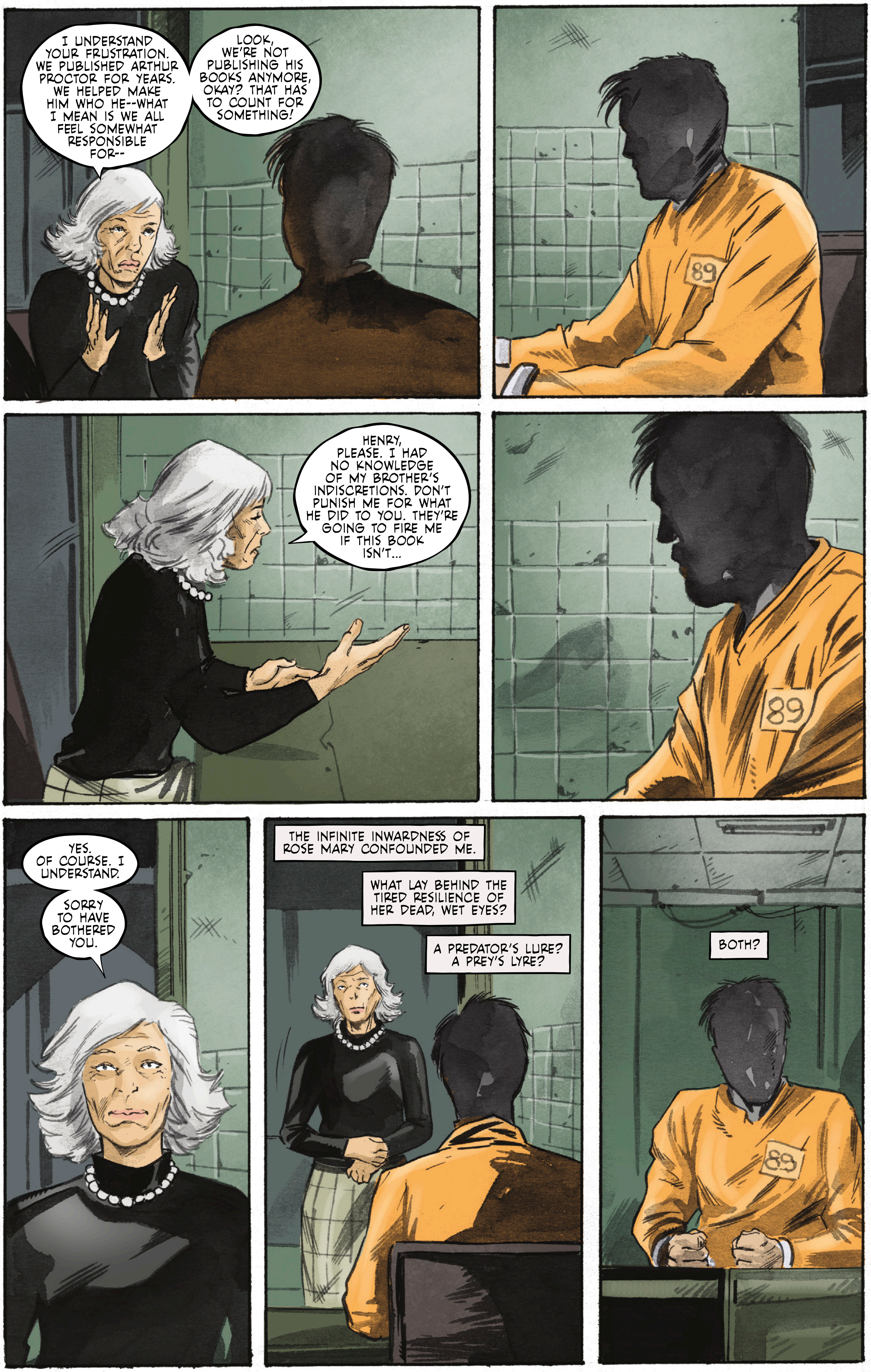

HERMANN&HUMBERT
WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOUR NIECE SAID *NO?!*
SHE DOESN'T WANT US PRINTING HER FATHER'S BOOKS ANY LONGER. AND I COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND. ARTHUR'S HAD HIS TIME IN THE SUN, IT'S TIME FOR US TO LOOK FOR NEW--
NEW?!
ARE YOU TRYING TO GET YOURSELF FIRED, WOMAN?! I'VE WARNED YOU ABOUT USING THE N-WORD IN THIS OFFICE!
AH MAYBE SHE'S RIGHT, OLD BOY. IF ARTHUR'S NOT AN OPTION, HENRY'S NEW BOOK MIGHT BE OUR BEST BET. WE NEED A NEW FRANCHISE.
WITH RESPECT, SIRS, HENRY'S NEW BOOK, *TERROR FORMING II,* IS A CRIME AGAINST ART. IT'S JUST REHASHED PLOT ELEMENTS FROM THE FIRST BOOK, ELEVATED BACKGROUND CHARACTERS NOBODY CARES ABOUT, AND A REDEMPTION ARC FOR THE MOST AWFUL CHARACTER WE'VE EVER PUBLISHED.
WHO WOULD BELIEVE SUCH A TERRIBLE CHARACTER CAPABLE OF REFORM? OUR READERS WILL SEE STRAIGHT THROUGH IT.
DON'T BE AN IMBECILE, ROSE. THEY'RE GENRE FICTION READERS. THEY DON'T ***SEE*** ANYTHING. WE COULD SPELL IT OUT FOR THEM DIRECTLY UPON THE PAGE AND THE HAPLESS REPROBATES WOULD BE NONE THE WISER.
THEY'D PROBABLY END UP CALLING IT ***SATIRE.***


OUR READERS DON'T WANT BOOKS THAT MAKE THEM THINK. THEY WANT BOOKS THAT MAKE THEM *THINK* THEY'RE THINKING. SO THEY CAN FEEL INTELLIGENT.
THEY DON'T WANT GENUINE ART THAT REQUIRES CONTEMPLATION. THEY WANT FORTUNE COOKIE PLATITUDES IN POETIC CADENCE SO THEY CAN FEEL LITERARY.
BUT, SIRS, HENRY'S LETTER FORBADE US FROM PUBLISHING HIS--
LISTEN, WOMAN, DO YOU THINK WE HAVE ANY DESIRE TO KEEP A PAEDOPHILE'S SISTER IN OUR EMPLOY?
IT WOULD GIVE US NOTHING BUT BOUNDLESS PLEASURE TO SEE YOU TURFED OUT ONTO THE STREET. YOU AND YOUR DELINQUENT NIECE.
SO MAKE HENRY HENRY CHANGE HIS MIND, OR FIND YOURSELF A NEW JOB.
SOMETHING THAT, WITH YOUR AGE AND REPUTATION...
...YOU WILL FIND EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT TO DO.
DISMISSED.


AND TO THINK I ONCE ADMIRED THE HAUGHTY, ARISTOCRATIC PATTER OF HERMANN & HUMBERT...
REGARDLESS! MY ENTRANCE INTO THIS TALE NOW APPROACHES. AND WITH IT, A FOREWARNING.
WHILE I WROTE A GREAT DEAL AT SCRIBLERUS, I DID NOT SPEAK A WORD.
SCRIBLERUS CORRECTIONAL FACILITY
HAVING SEEN FIRST HAND THE DAMAGE OF MY WORDS, I ELECTED TO AVAIL MYSELF OF THEM. TO DEFANG MYSELF FOR THE SAFETY OF OTHERS.
THAT I MIGHT LISTEN TO THOSE VERY SAME OTHERS, LEARN, AND DO BETTER.
THERE IS MUCH WISDOM TO BE FOUND IN SILENCE.
HENRY HENRY!
89
THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR AGREEING TO MEET WITH ME. IT'S LOVELY TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
HOW ARE YOU?
89

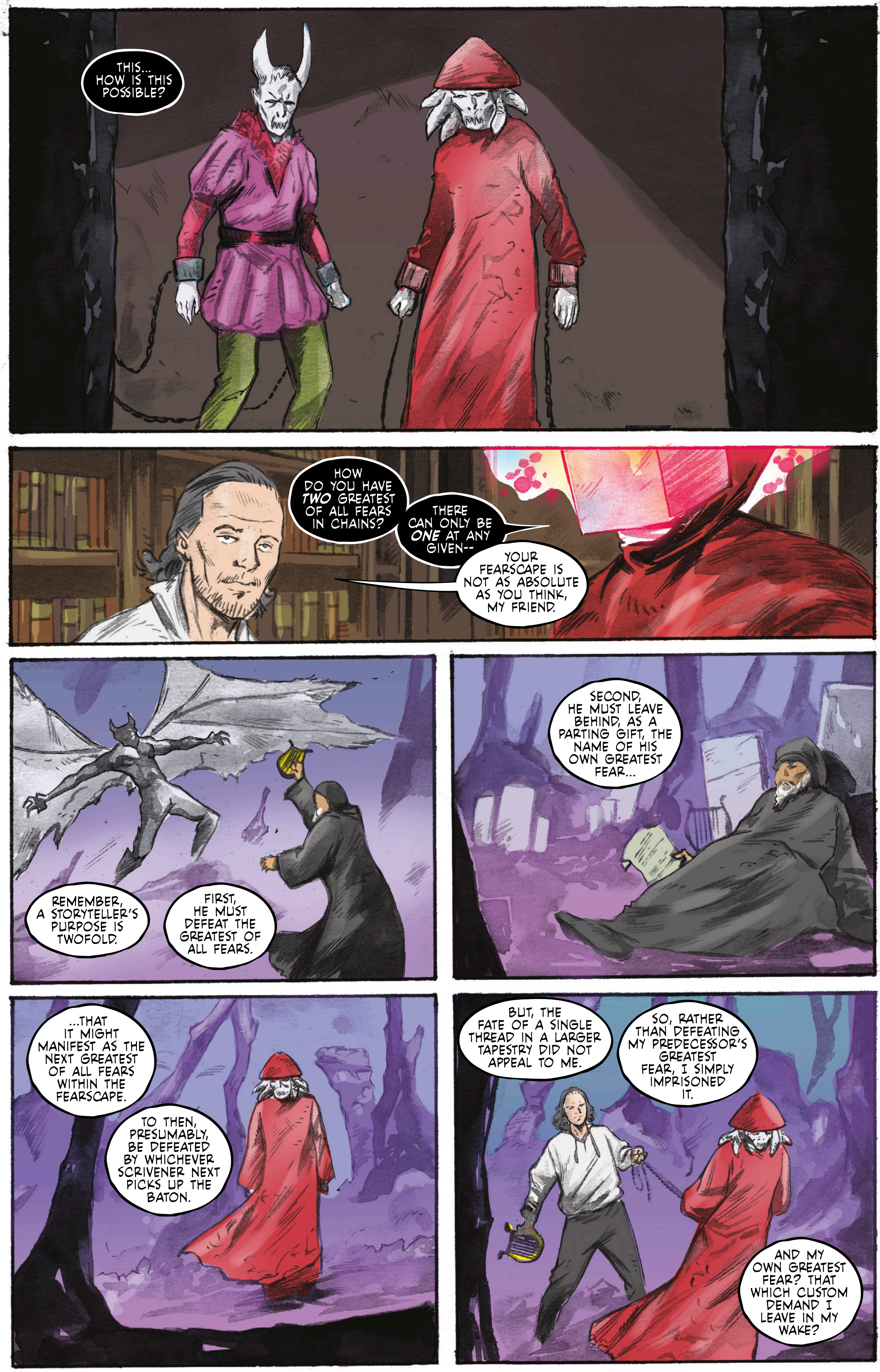

OH YES, OF COURSE.
WOULD YOU TWO MIND LEAVING US?
THERE, ISN'T THAT BETTER? NOW WE MAY SPEAK FREELY.
AS I IMAGINE YOU'VE GUESSED, I'M HERE ABOUT *TERROR FORMING II*. NOW BEFORE YOU SAY ANYTHING--
I REREAD IT THIS WEEKEND. ALONG WITH THE LETTER YOU RELEASED, DEMANDING WE...WELL...
YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS ABOUT US NOT PUBLISHING IT. SURELY THIS IS JUST A CASE OF COLD FEET?

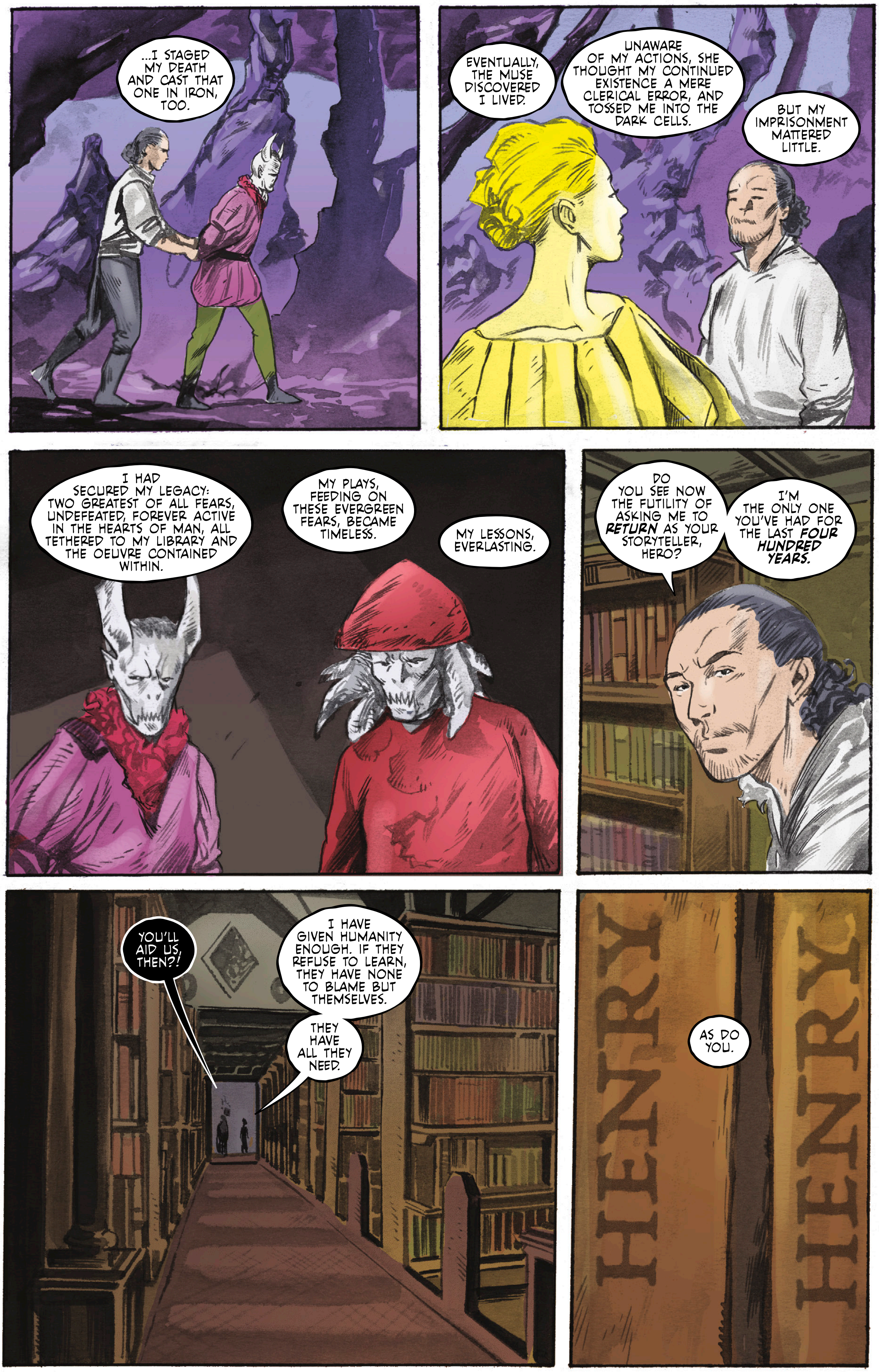
YOUR NOVEL HAS A STRONG...AUTHENTIC VOICE TO IT. AN URGENT, EARNEST, SINCERE PIECE OF FICTION THAT IS LIGHT-YEARS BEYOND THE IRONY OF YOUR FIRST BOOK.
AND THE STORY AROUND ITS CONSTRUCTION--A NOVEL WRITTEN TO HELP YOU HEAL YOURSELF--WELL, IT'S CAPTURED THE HEARTS OF ALL YOUR READERS!
CHANNELING YOUR PERSONAL PAIN INTO A WORK OF ART? OTHERS CAN LEARN FROM THAT.
YOU HAVE A MORAL DUTY TO RELEASE THIS BOOK. TO SOCIETY.
89

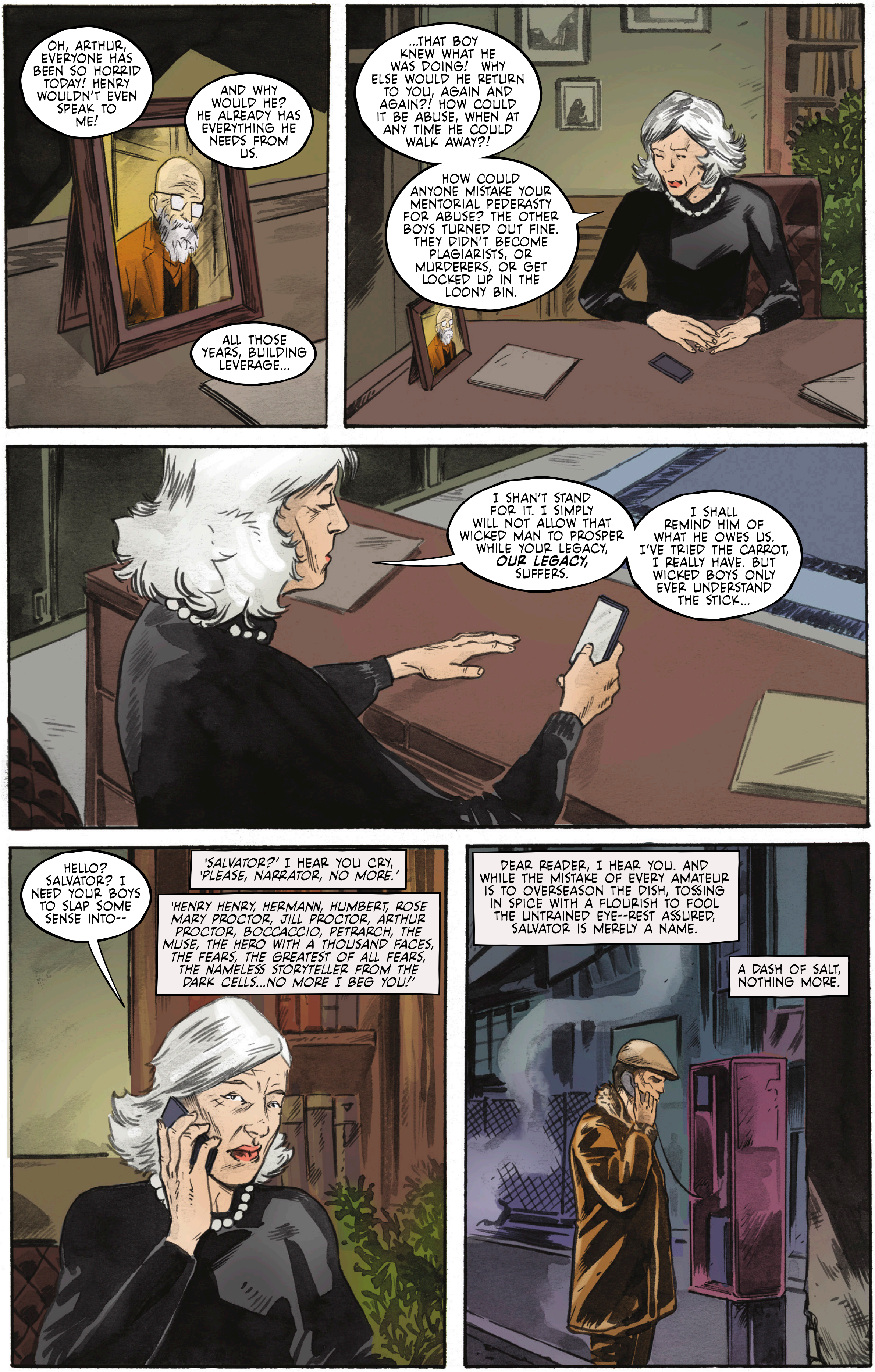

I UNDERSTAND YOUR FRUSTRATION. WE PUBLISHED ARTHUR PROCTOR FOR YEARS. WE HELPED MAKE HIM WHO HE--WHAT I MEAN IS WE ALL FEEL SOMEWHAT RESPONSIBLE FOR--
LOOK, WE'RE NOT PUBLISHING HIS BOOKS ANYMORE, OKAY? THAT HAS TO COUNT FOR SOMETHING!
89
HENRY, PLEASE. I HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF MY BROTHER'S INDISCRETIONS. DON'T PUNISH ME FOR WHAT HE DID TO YOU. THEY'RE GOING TO FIRE ME IF THIS BOOK ISN'T...
89
YES. OF COURSE. I UNDERSTAND.
SORRY TO HAVE BOTHERED YOU.
THE INFINITE INWARDNESS OF ROSE MARY CONFOUNDED ME.
WHAT LAY BEHIND THE TIRED RESILIENCE OF HER DEAD, WET EYES?
A PREDATOR'S LURE? A PREY'S LYRE?
BOTH?
89

ENOUGH VANITY. THE TELLER IS NOT THE TALE. LET US RETURN TO THE HERO, AND SPEAK MY NAME NO FURTHER!
HENRY INFINITY?
OH, IGNORE THAT. A PREDICTABLE PUNCHLINE TO A TIRED STRING OF JOKES.
WHEN LOCKED UP FOR CENTURIES, THE MIND DOTH WONDER.
HENRY ∞
FASCINATING.
...WHICH OF YOUR PLAYS ARE WE HERE TO COLLECT?
COLLECT MY PLAYS? WHO ON EARTH WOULD WANT TO DO THAT?
NOW WHERE DID I PUT THAT LEVER...
DID YOU PEN ALL OF THESE, SCRIVENER? I DON'T SEE YOUR NAME SCRAWLED ON ANY OF THE COVERS.
HENRY IV
HENRY V
HENRY VI
HENRY VII
HENRY VIII
HENRY IX
HENRY X
HENRY XI
HENRY XII
HENRY XII
HENRY XIII
HENRY XIV

IT'S ON THOSE THAT COUNT.
AHA! JUST WHERE I LEFT IT.
UPSTART CROW!
BLACK SWAN!
OH, MY FRIENDS, HOW I HAVE MISSED YOU...


THIS... HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE?
HOW DO YOU HAVE *TWO* GREATEST OF ALL FEARS IN CHAINS?
THERE CAN ONLY BE *ONE* AT ANY GIVEN--
YOUR FEARSCAPE IS NOT AS ABSOLUTE AS YOU THINK, MY FRIEND.
REMEMBER, A STORYTELLER'S PURPOSE IS TWOFOLD.
FIRST, HE MUST DEFEAT THE GREATEST OF ALL FEARS.
SECOND, HE MUST LEAVE BEHIND, AS A PARTING GIFT, THE NAME OF HIS OWN GREATEST FEAR...
...THAT IT MIGHT MANIFEST AS THE NEXT GREATEST OF ALL FEARS WITHIN THE FEARSCAPE.
TO THEN, PRESUMABLY, BE DEFEATED BY WHICHEVER SCRIVENER NEXT PICKS UP THE BATON.
BUT, THE FATE OF A SINGLE THREAD IN A LARGER TAPESTRY DID NOT APPEAL TO ME.
SO, RATHER THAN DEFEATING MY PREDECESSOR'S GREATEST FEAR, I SIMPLY IMPRISONED IT.
AND MY OWN GREATEST FEAR? THAT WHICH CUSTOM DEMAND I LEAVE IN MY WAKE?


...I STAGED MY DEATH AND CAST THAT ONE IN IRON, TOO.
EVENTUALLY, THE MUSE DISCOVERED I LIVED.
UNAWARE OF MY ACTIONS, SHE THOUGHT MY CONTINUED EXISTENCE A MERE CLERICAL ERROR, AND TOSSED ME INTO THE DARK CELLS.
BUT MY IMPRISONMENT MATTERED LITTLE.
I HAD SECURED MY LEGACY: TWO GREATEST OF ALL FEARS, UNDEFEATED, FOREVER ACTIVE IN THE HEARTS OF MAN, ALL TETHERED TO MY LIBRARY AND THE OEUVRE CONTAINED WITHIN.
MY PLAYS, FEEDING ON THESE EVERGREEN FEARS, BECAME TIMELESS.
MY LESSONS, EVERLASTING.
DO YOU SEE NOW THE FUTILITY OF ASKING ME TO *RETURN* AS YOUR STORYTELLER, HERO?
I'M THE ONLY ONE YOU'VE HAD FOR THE LAST *FOUR HUNDRED YEARS.*
YOU'LL AID US, THEN?!
I HAVE GIVEN HUMANITY ENOUGH. IF THEY REFUSE TO LEARN, THEY HAVE NONE TO BLAME BUT THEMSELVES.
THEY HAVE ALL THEY NEED.
HENRY
HENRY
AS DO YOU.



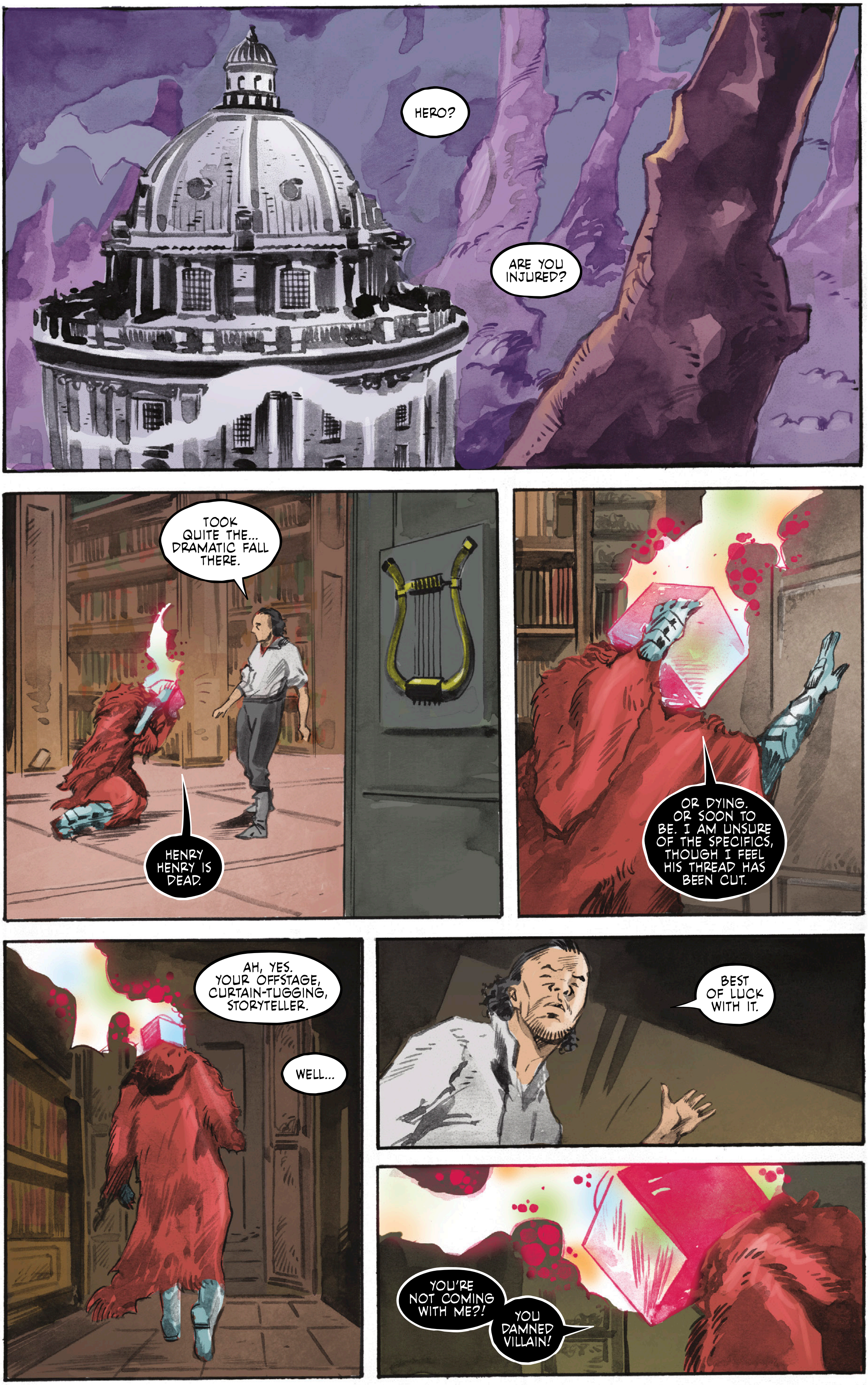
OH, ARTHUR, EVERYONE HAS BEEN SO HORRID TODAY! HENRY WOULDN'T EVEN SPEAK TO ME!
AND WHY WOULD HE? HE ALREADY HAS EVERYTHING HE NEEDS FROM US.
ALL THOSE YEARS, BUILDING LEVERAGE...
...THAT BOY KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING! WHY ELSE WOULD HE RETURN TO YOU, AGAIN AND AGAIN?! HOW COULD IT BE ABUSE, WHEN AT ANY TIME HE COULD WALK AWAY?!
HOW COULD ANYONE MISTAKE YOUR MENTORIAL PEDERASTY FOR ABUSE? THE OTHER BOYS TURNED OUT FINE. THEY DIDN'T BECOME PLAGIARISTS, OR MURDERERS, OR GET LOCKED UP IN THE LOONY BIN.
I SHAN'T STAND FOR IT. I SIMPLY WILL NOT ALLOW THAT WICKED MAN TO PROSPER WHILE YOUR LEGACY, ***OUR LEGACY,*** SUFFERS.
I SHALL REMIND HIM OF WHAT HE OWES US. I'VE TRIED THE CARROT, I REALLY HAVE. BUT WICKED BOYS ONLY EVER UNDERSTAND THE STICK...
HELLO? SALVATOR? I NEED YOUR BOYS TO SLAP SOME SENSE INTO--
'SALVATOR?' I HEAR YOU CRY, 'PLEASE, NARRATOR, NO MORE.'
'HENRY HENRY, HERMANN, HUMBERT, ROSE MARY PROCTOR, JILL PROCTOR, ARTHUR PROCTOR, BOCCACCIO, PETRARCH, THE MUSE, THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES, THE FEARS, THE GREATEST OF ALL FEARS, THE NAMELESS STORYTELLER FROM THE DARK CELLS...NO MORE I BEG YOU!'
DEAR READER, I HEAR YOU. AND WHILE THE MISTAKE OF EVERY AMATEUR IS TO OVERSEASON THE DISH, TOSSING IN SPICE WITH A FLOURISH TO FOOL THE UNTRAINED EYE--REST ASSURED, SALVATOR IS MERELY A NAME.
A DASH OF SALT, NOTHING MORE.

TASTE IT. SEE FOR YOURSELF: SAL-VA-TOR.
THREE LITTLE BEATS.
SAL. SOFT HISS OF MIST, THE TIP OF THE TONGUE TAPPING INTO WILLING RED-RIPE FLESH, BECKONING MORE.
VA. MIRRORED GASP, OPENED WIDE, WORD'S GIRTH PUSHING THROUGH.
TOR. COMPLETE RELEASE, A KISS TO THE WIND AND WE ARE SPENT.
CARESS OF S, CULLED BY CUT OF V AND T, REDEEMED BY ROLLED R.
SAL-VA-TOR, A ROMANCE IN THREE PARTS.
SAY IT WITH ME, READER...

SAL.
VA.
FUCK...

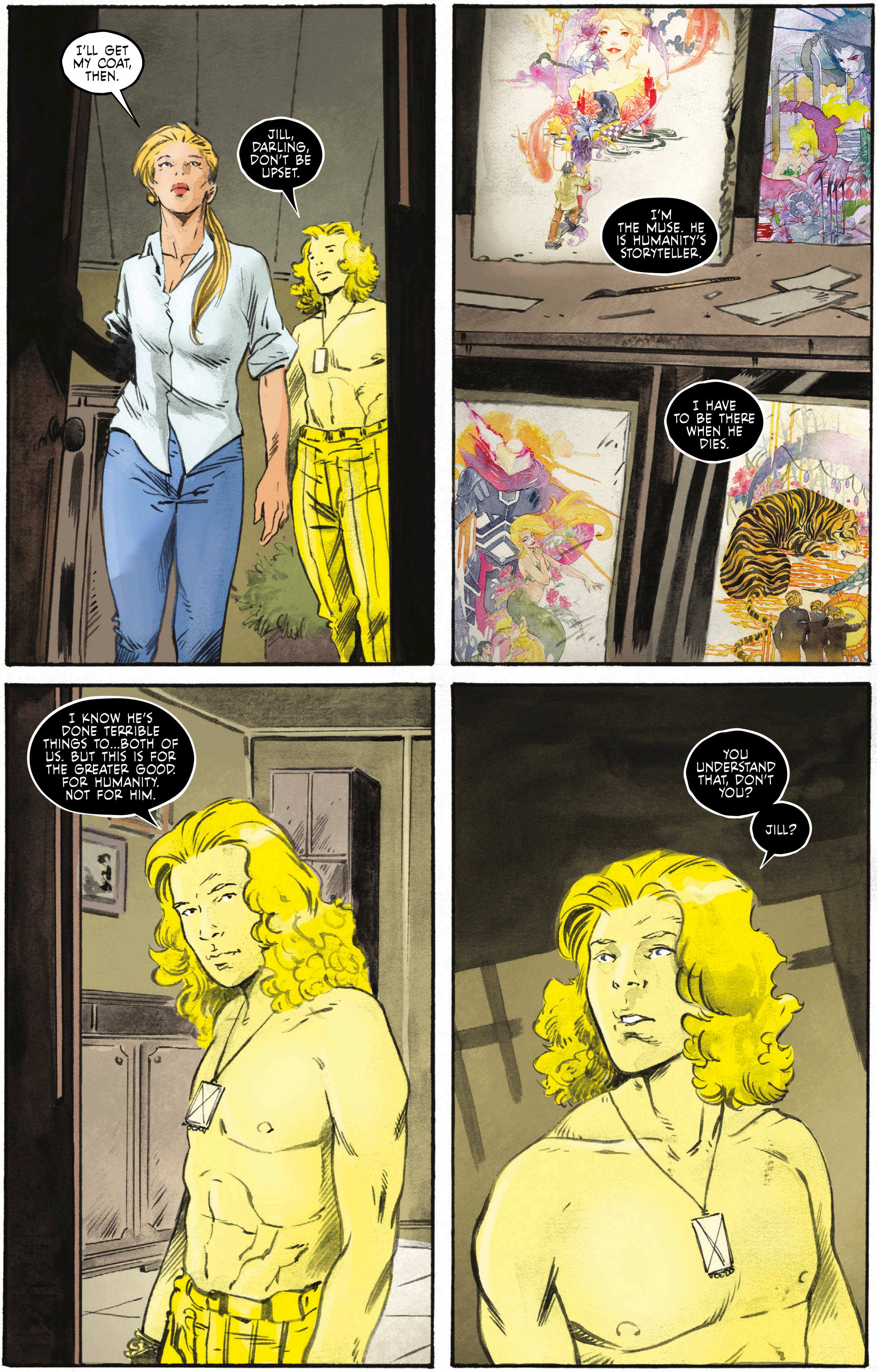
END CHAPTER ONE

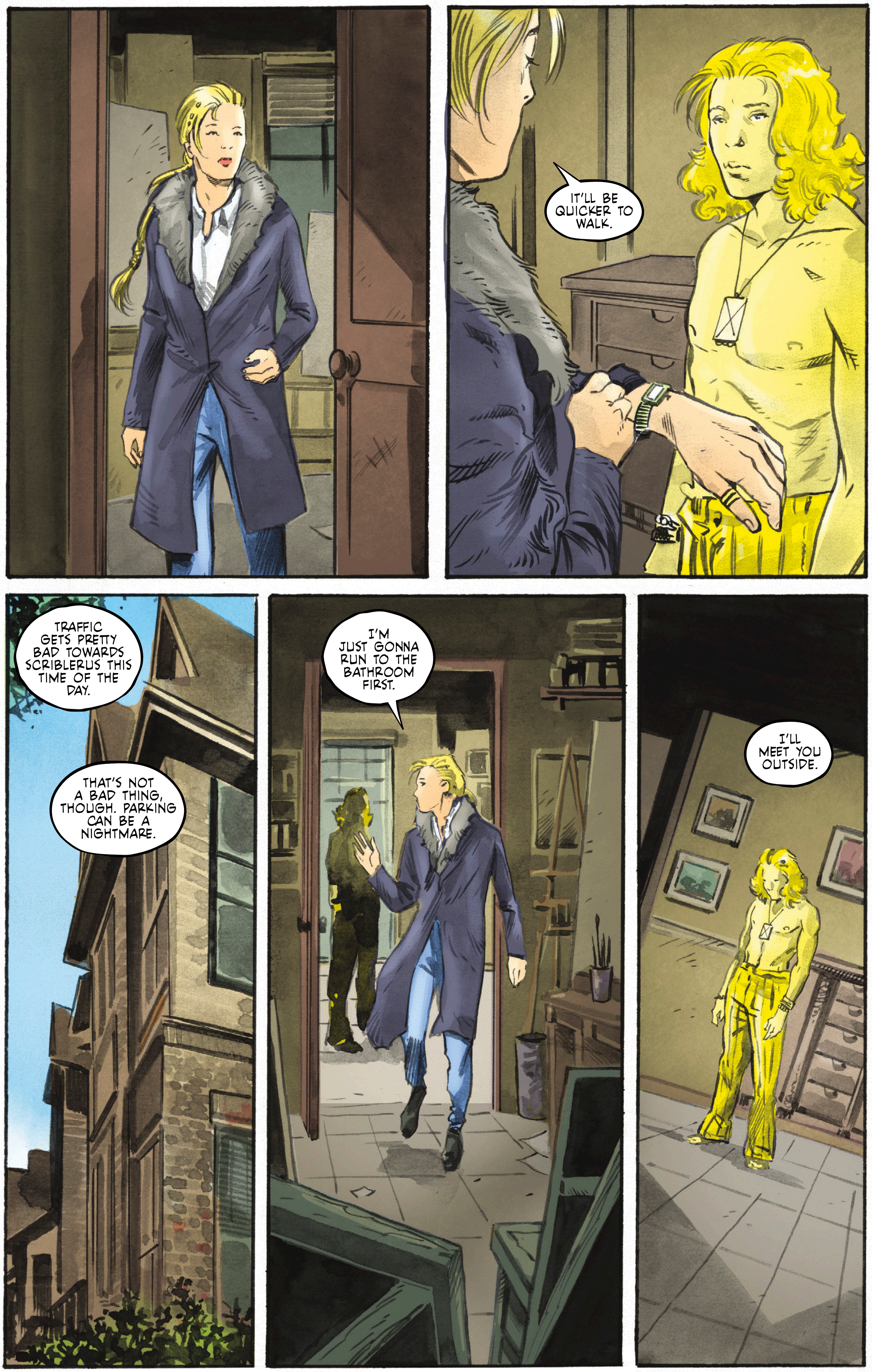
CHAPTER TWO

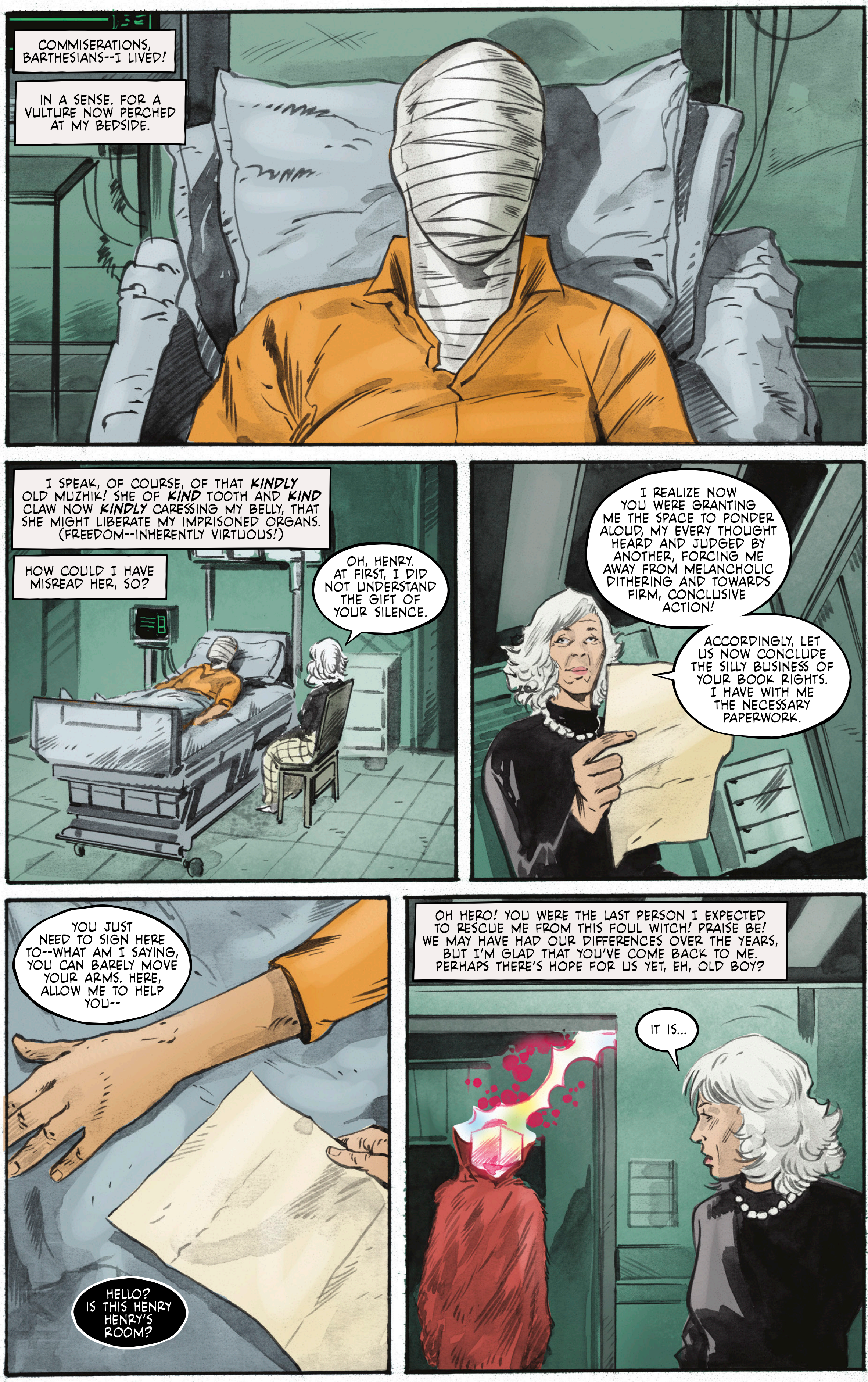

HERO?
ARE YOU INJURED?
TOOK QUITE THE... DRAMATIC FALL THERE.
HENRY HENRY IS DEAD.
OR DYING. OR SOON TO BE. I AM UNSURE OF THE SPECIFICS, THOUGH I FEEL HIS THREAD HAS BEEN CUT.
AH, YES. YOUR OFFSTAGE, CURTAIN-TUGGING, STORYTELLER.
WELL...
BEST OF LUCK WITH IT.
YOU'RE NOT COMING WITH ME?!
YOU DAMNED VILLAIN!

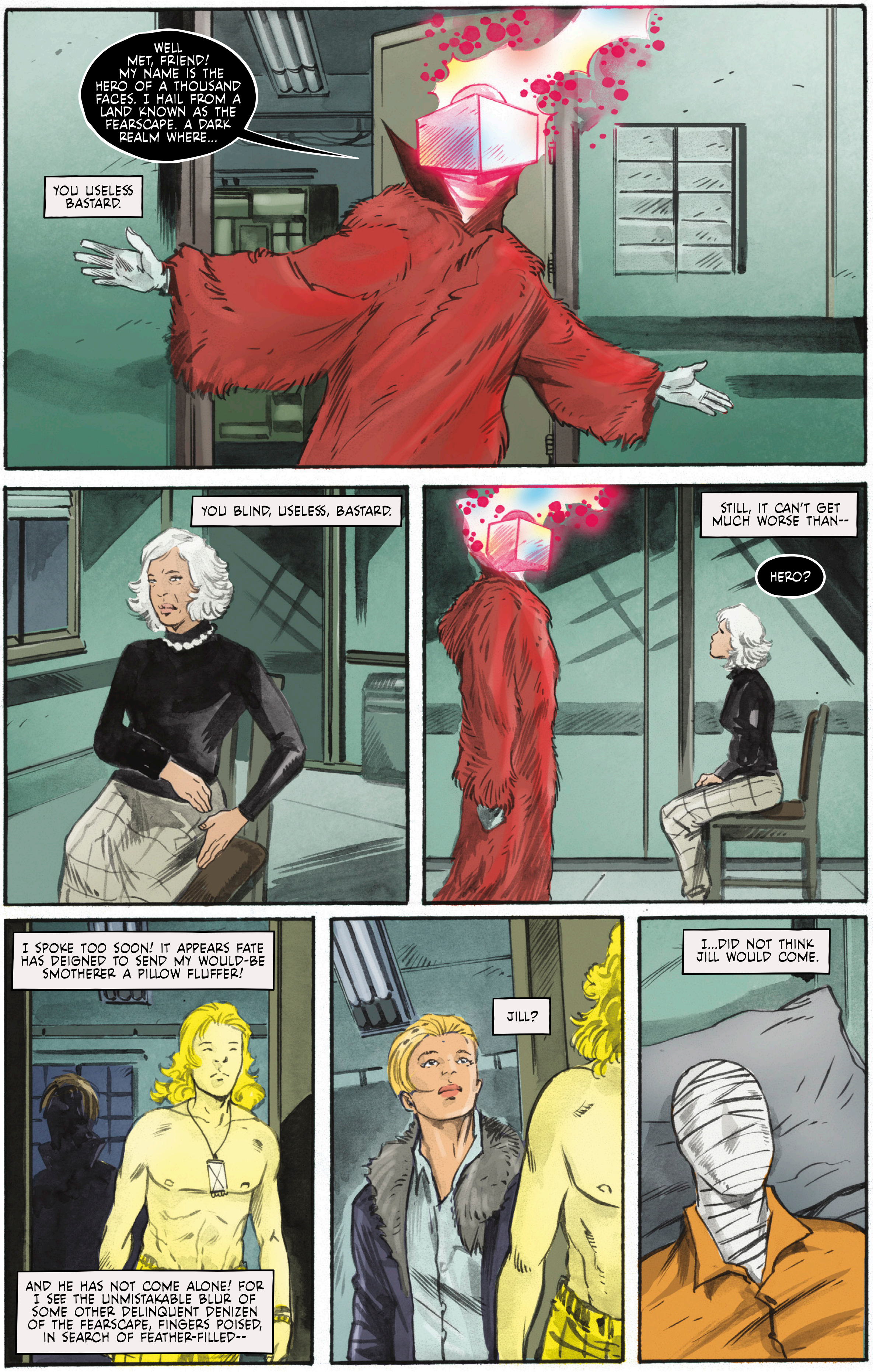
I AM SORRY TO HEAR THAT ONE YOU'VE PREVIOUSLY REFERRED TO AS A "TREACHEROUS MALCONTENT" IS UPON DEATH'S DOOR. I CAN ONLY IMAGINE HOW DEVASTATED YOU MUST FEEL.
UNCARING WRETCH! HAVE YOU NO SOUL?
THIS IS A REALM OF MAGIC. THERE IS NAUGHT HERE *BUT* SOUL.
CUR! FOREVER WITH THY TRICKSY WORDINGS! I AM A FOOL FOR EXPECTING AUGHT ELSE! FOR EXPECTING YOUR AID!
AS PERCEPTIVE AS EVER, HERO. I SHALL MISS TALKING WITH YOU.
BAH! I TAKE MY LEAVE OF YOU!
TO THINK...
...I CAME HERE IN SEARCH OF OUR GREATEST STORYTELLER.
ONLY TO BE MET WITH A GHOST.

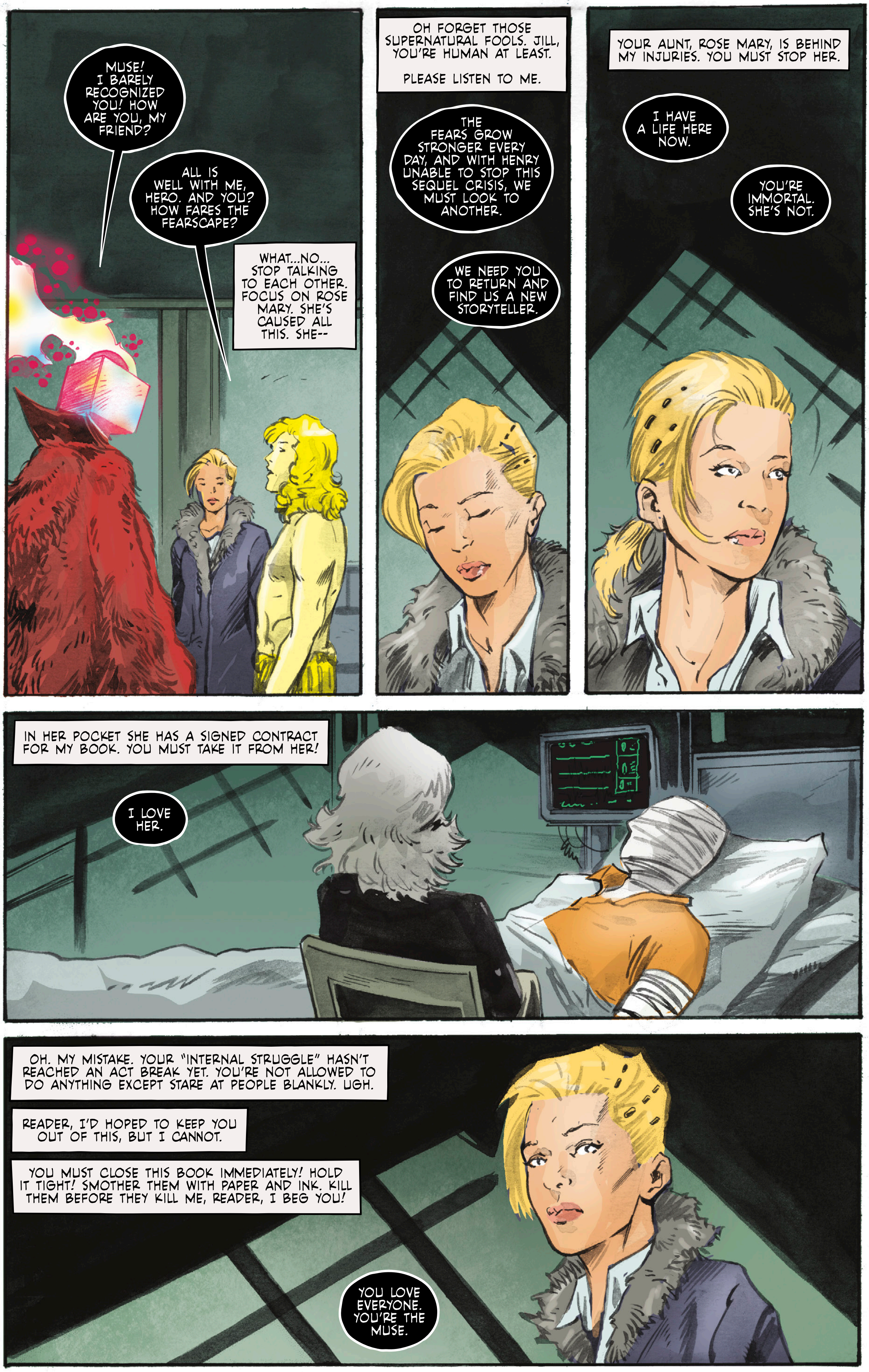
MUSE? BABY?
YOU FELL PRETTY HARD. ARE YOU OKAY?
HENRY... HENRY...
WHAT? HON, I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
HENRY HENRY HAS BEEN MORTALLY WOUNDED.
I MUST GO TO HIM.
I SEE.


I'LL GET MY COAT, THEN.
JILL, DARLING, DON'T BE UPSET.
I'M THE MUSE. HE IS HUMANITY'S STORYTELLER.
I HAVE TO BE THERE WHEN HE DIES.
I KNOW HE'S DONE TERRIBLE THINGS TO...BOTH OF US. BUT THIS IS FOR THE GREATER GOOD. FOR HUMANITY. NOT FOR HIM.
YOU UNDERSTAND THAT, DON'T YOU?
JILL?

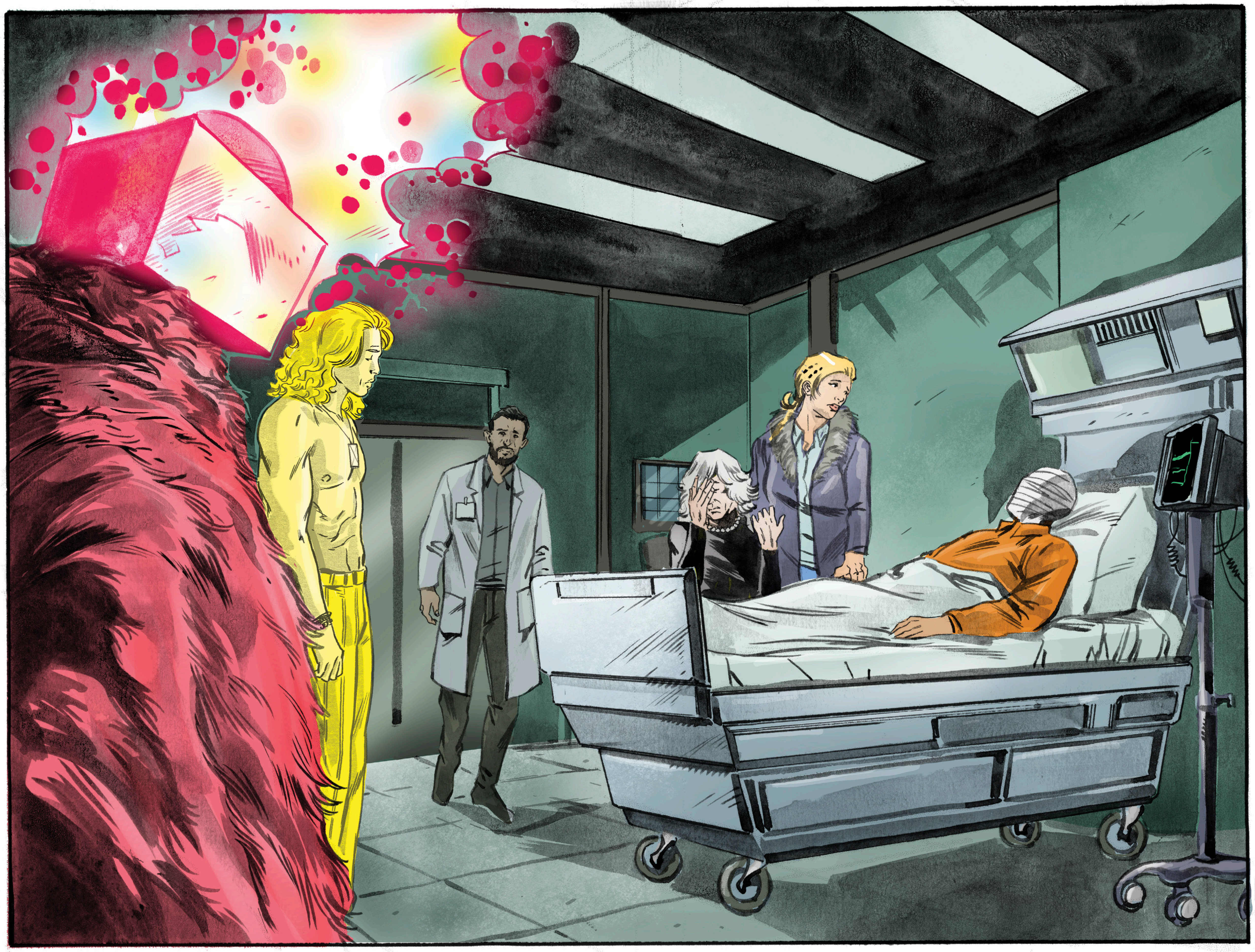

IT'LL BE QUICKER TO WALK.
TRAFFIC GETS PRETTY BAD TOWARDS SCRIBLERUS THIS TIME OF THE DAY.
THAT'S NOT A BAD THING, THOUGH. PARKING CAN BE A NIGHTMARE.
I'M JUST GONNA RUN TO THE BATHROOM FIRST.
I'LL MEET YOU OUTSIDE.

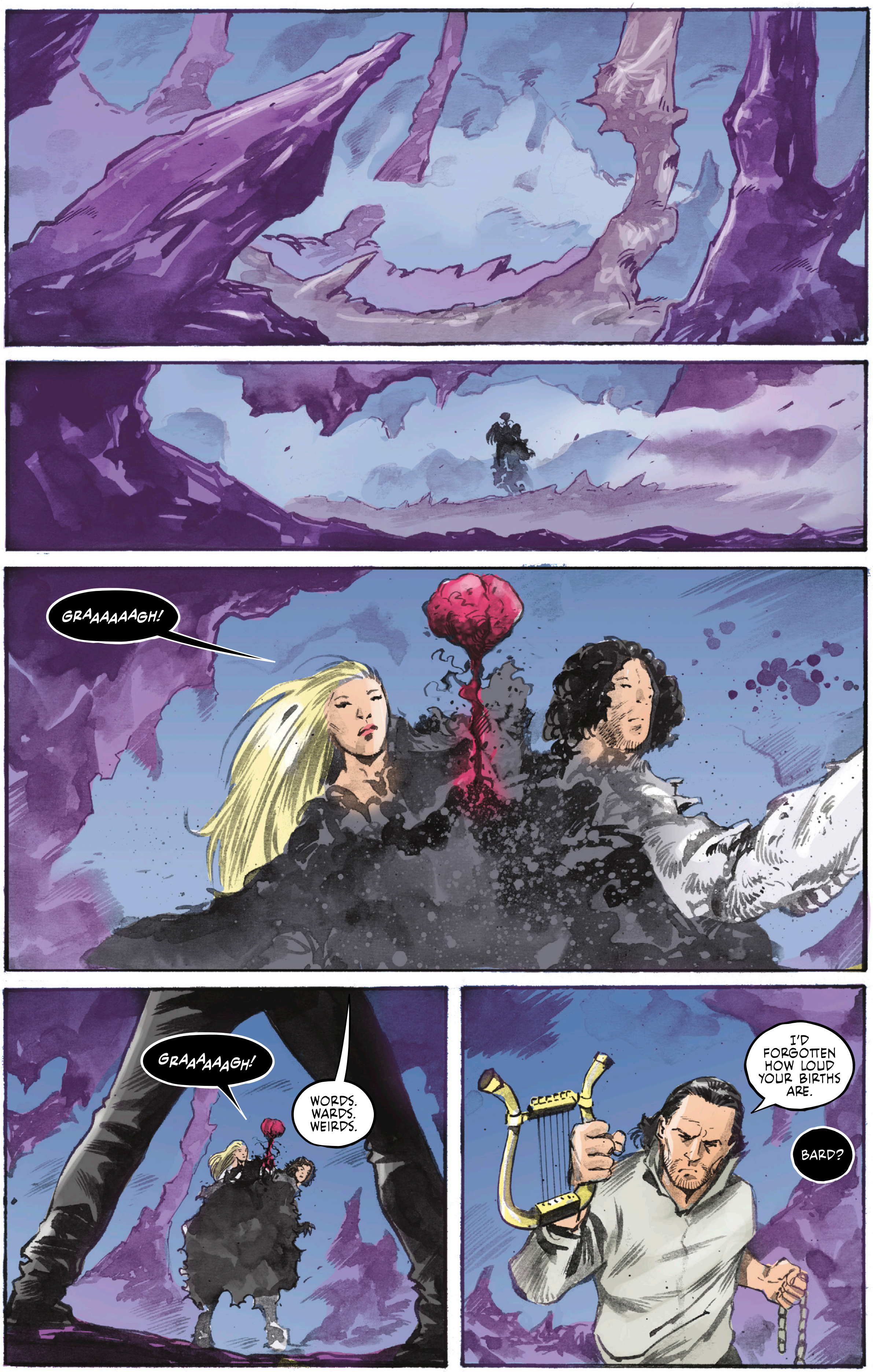

COMMISERATIONS, BARTHESIANS--I LIVED!
IN A SENSE. FOR A VULTURE NOW PERCHED AT MY BEDSIDE.
I SPEAK, OF COURSE, OF THAT *KINDLY* OLD MUZHIK! SHE OF *KIND* TOOTH AND *KIND* CLAW NOW *KINDLY* CARESSING MY BELLY, THAT SHE MIGHT LIBERATE MY IMPRISONED ORGANS. (FREEDOM--INHERENTLY VIRTUOUS!)
HOW COULD I HAVE MISREAD HER, SO?
OH, HENRY. AT FIRST, I DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE GIFT OF YOUR SILENCE.
I REALIZE NOW YOU WERE GRANTING ME THE SPACE TO PONDER ALOUD, MY EVERY THOUGHT HEARD AND JUDGED BY ANOTHER, FORCING ME AWAY FROM MELANCHOLIC DITHERING AND TOWARDS FIRM, CONCLUSIVE ACTION!
ACCORDINGLY, LET US NOW CONCLUDE THE SILLY BUSINESS OF YOUR BOOK RIGHTS. I HAVE WITH ME THE NECESSARY PAPERWORK.
YOU JUST NEED TO SIGN HERE TO--WHAT AM I SAYING, YOU CAN BARELY MOVE YOUR ARMS. HERE, ALLOW ME TO HELP YOU--
HELLO? IS THIS HENRY HENRY'S ROOM?
OH HERO! YOU WERE THE LAST PERSON I EXPECTED TO RESCUE ME FROM THIS FOUL WITCH! PRAISE BE! WE MAY HAVE HAD OUR DIFFERENCES OVER THE YEARS, BUT I'M GLAD THAT YOU'VE COME BACK TO ME. PERHAPS THERE'S HOPE FOR US YET, EH, OLD BOY?
IT IS...


WELL MET, FRIEND! MY NAME IS THE HERO OF A THOUSAND FACES. I HAIL FROM A LAND KNOWN AS THE FEARSCAPE. A DARK REALM WHERE...
YOU USELESS BASTARD.
YOU BLIND, USELESS, BASTARD.
STILL, IT CAN'T GET MUCH WORSE THAN--
HERO?
I SPOKE TOO SOON! IT APPEARS FATE HAS DEIGNED TO SEND MY WOULD-BE SMOTHERER A PILLOW FLUFFER!
AND HE HAS NOT COME ALONE! FOR I SEE THE UNMISTAKABLE BLUR OF SOME OTHER DELINQUENT DENIZEN OF THE FEARSCAPE, FINGERS POISED, IN SEARCH OF FEATHER-FILLED--
JILL?
I...DID NOT THINK JILL WOULD COME.

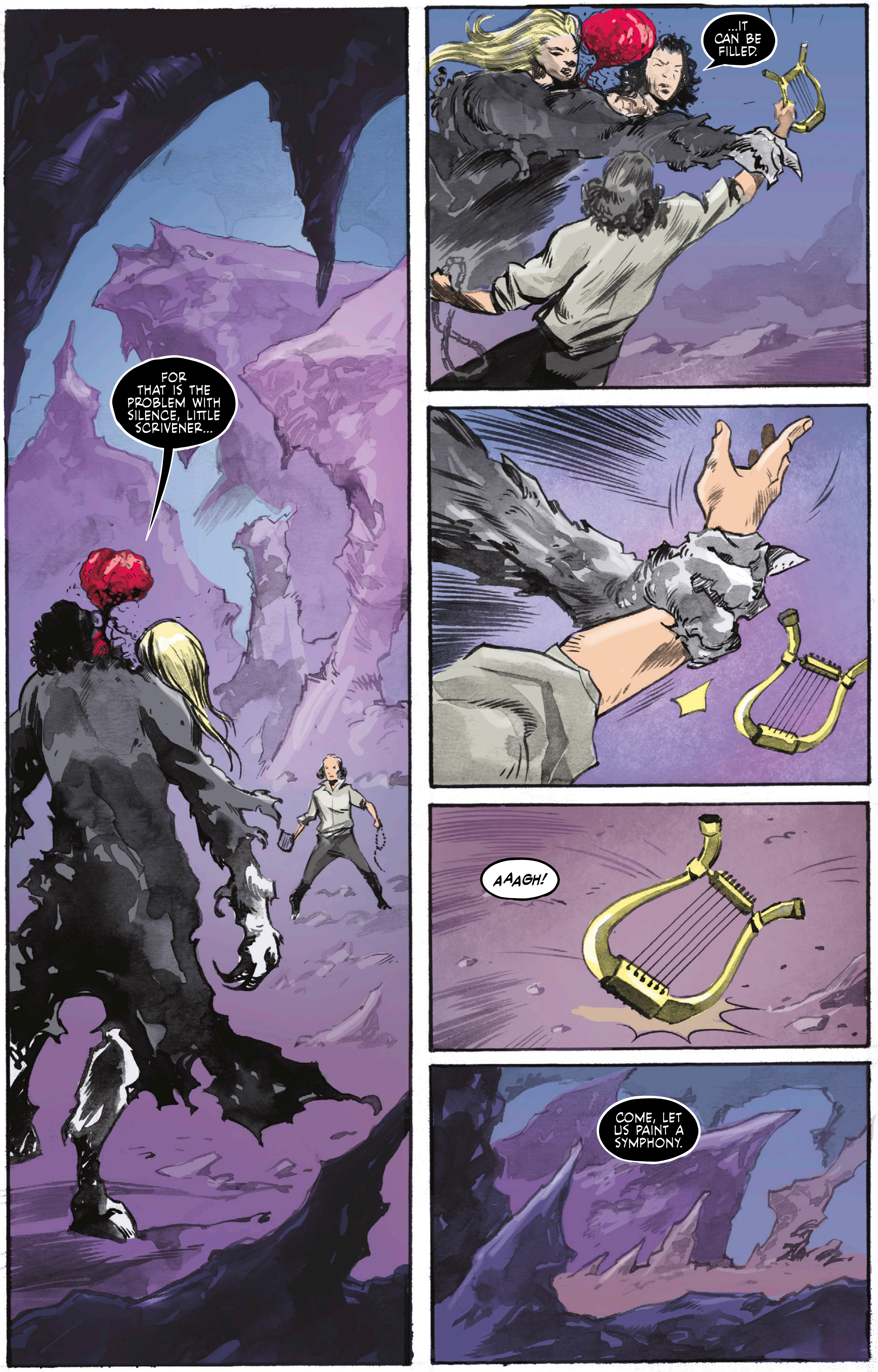

MUSE! I BARELY RECOGNIZED YOU! HOW ARE YOU, MY FRIEND?
ALL IS WELL WITH ME, HERO. AND YOU? HOW FARES THE FEARSCAPE?
WHAT...NO... STOP TALKING TO EACH OTHER. FOCUS ON ROSE MARY. SHE'S CAUSED ALL THIS. SHE--
OH FORGET THOSE SUPERNATURAL FOOLS. JILL, YOU'RE HUMAN AT LEAST.
PLEASE LISTEN TO ME.
THE FEARS GROW STRONGER EVERY DAY, AND WITH HENRY UNABLE TO STOP THIS SEQUEL CRISIS, WE MUST LOOK TO ANOTHER.
WE NEED YOU TO RETURN AND FIND US A NEW STORYTELLER.
YOUR AUNT, ROSE MARY, IS BEHIND MY INJURIES. YOU MUST STOP HER.
I HAVE A LIFE HERE NOW.
YOU'RE IMMORTAL. SHE'S NOT.
IN HER POCKET SHE HAS A SIGNED CONTRACT FOR MY BOOK. YOU MUST TAKE IT FROM HER!
I LOVE HER.
OH. MY MISTAKE. YOUR "INTERNAL STRUGGLE" HASN'T REACHED AN ACT BREAK YET. YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED TO DO ANYTHING EXCEPT STARE AT PEOPLE BLANKLY. UGH.
READER, I'D HOPED TO KEEP YOU OUT OF THIS, BUT I CANNOT.
YOU MUST CLOSE THIS BOOK IMMEDIATELY! HOLD IT TIGHT! SMOTHER THEM WITH PAPER AND INK. KILL THEM BEFORE THEY KILL ME, READER, I BEG YOU!
YOU LOVE EVERYONE. YOU'RE THE MUSE.

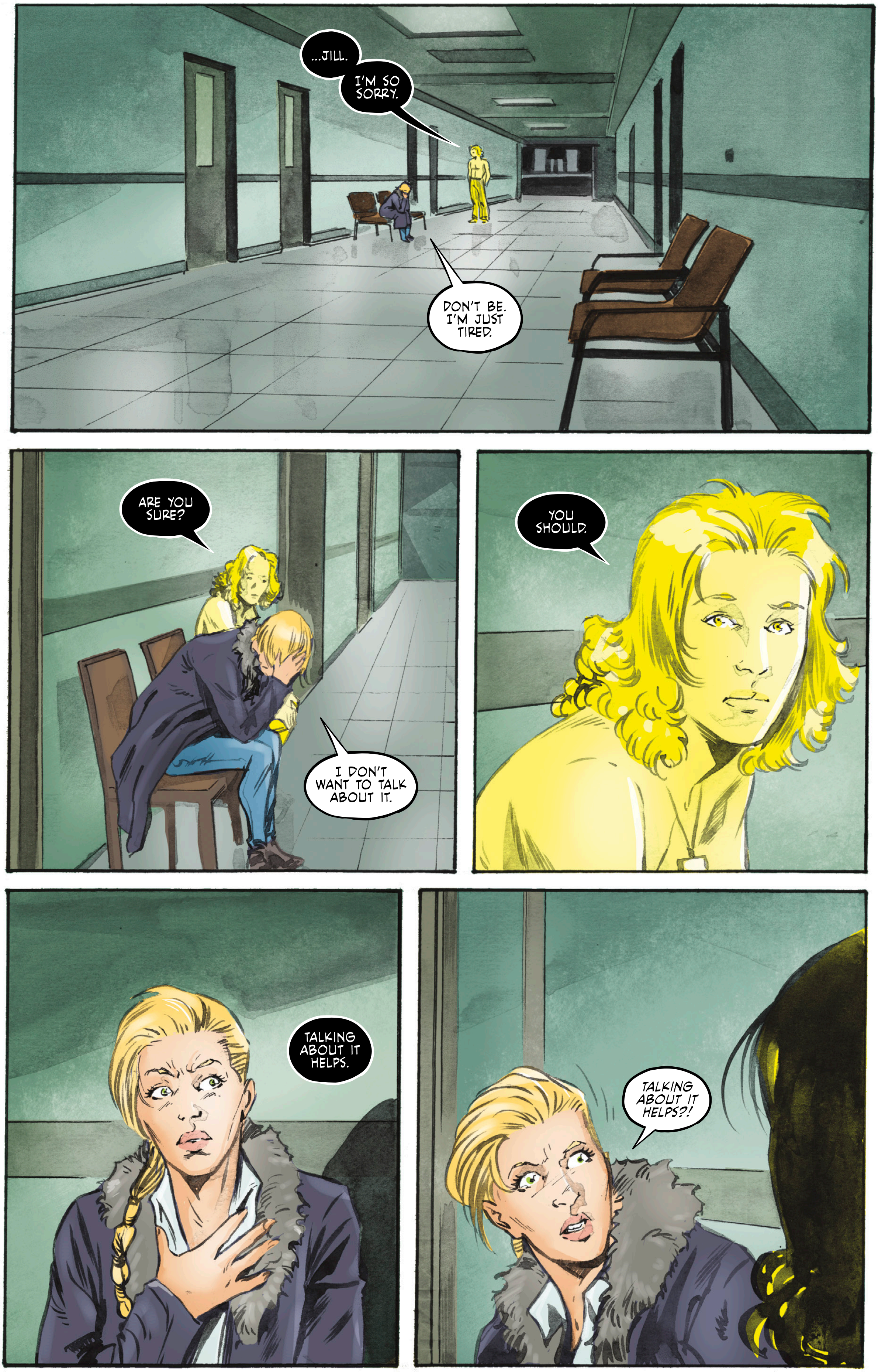
IGNORE ME! DO NOT CLOSE THE BOOK! INSTEAD, TAKE UP YOUR PEN.
I SHALL PROVIDE A SPACE FOR YOU. YOU MUST WRITE IN IT A WARNING THAT THESE CHARACTERS MIGHT TAKE NOTICE OF!
BE SURE TO USE THE BLACKEST INK YOU CAN FIND, AS DARK AS THE VOID. FOR ONLY IN THE BLACK WELL OF PRIMORDIAL UNCREATION WILL OUR TWO WORLDS TOUCH AS WE NEED THEM TO.
THE SPACE FOR YOUR MESSAGE NOW FOLLOWS. BE QUICK, READER!
GO! WRITE!
YOU SHOULDN'T ALL BE IN HERE! THIS IS A PRIVATE--
CALM YOURSELF, DOCTOR. WE ARE THIS MAN'S GUARDIANS. TELL ME, WHAT IS HIS CONDITION?
HIS CONDITION? DID NO ONE...?
BLAST! A DOCTOR ARRIVED. HIS VOICE COVERED OUR PLACE IN THE MELODY.
I...I'M SO SORRY...
WE ARE ALMOST OUT OF TIME. AGAIN, READER, AGAIN! TAKE UP YOUR PEN!
HE'S...
WE MUST TRY AGA

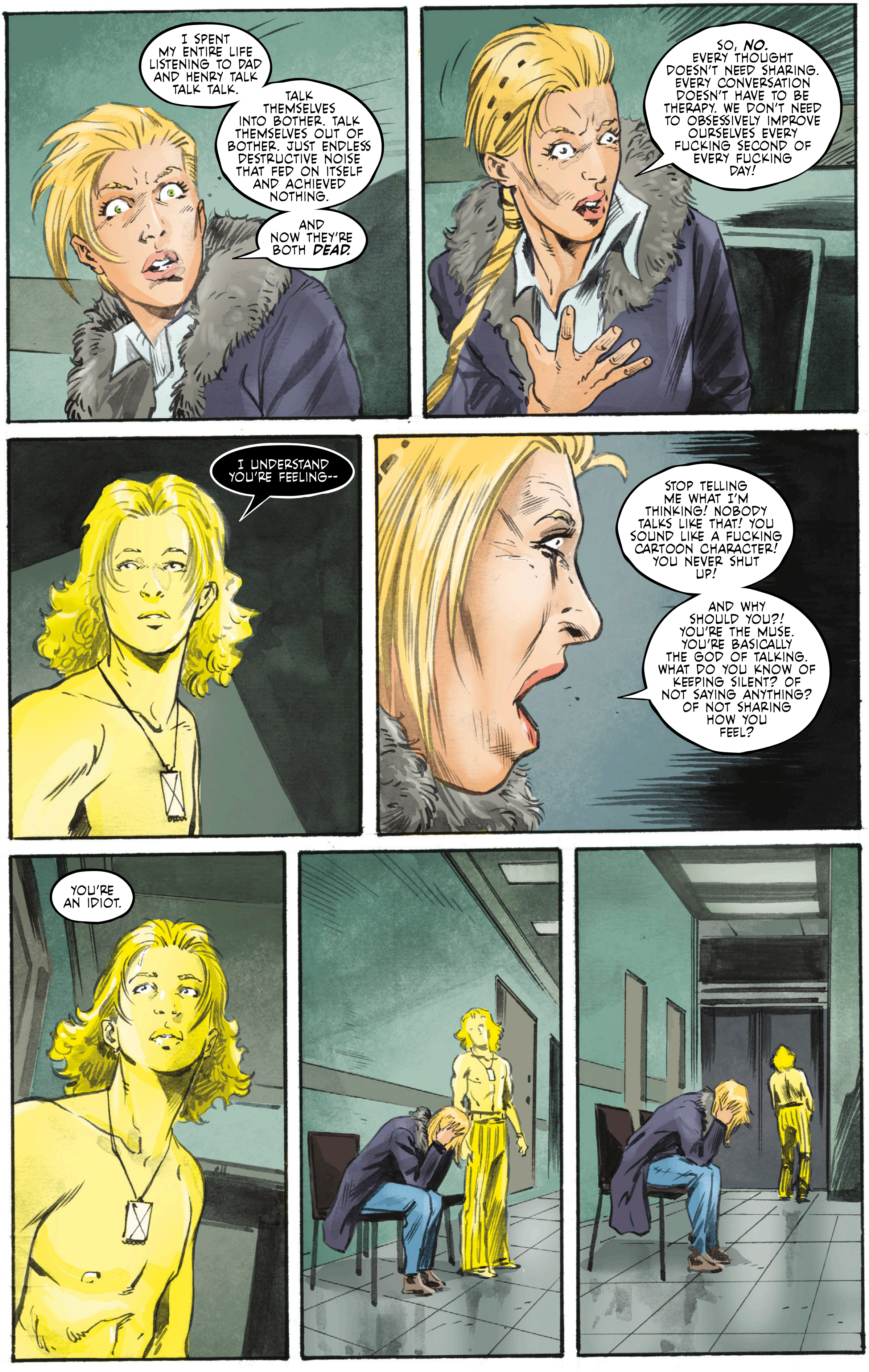


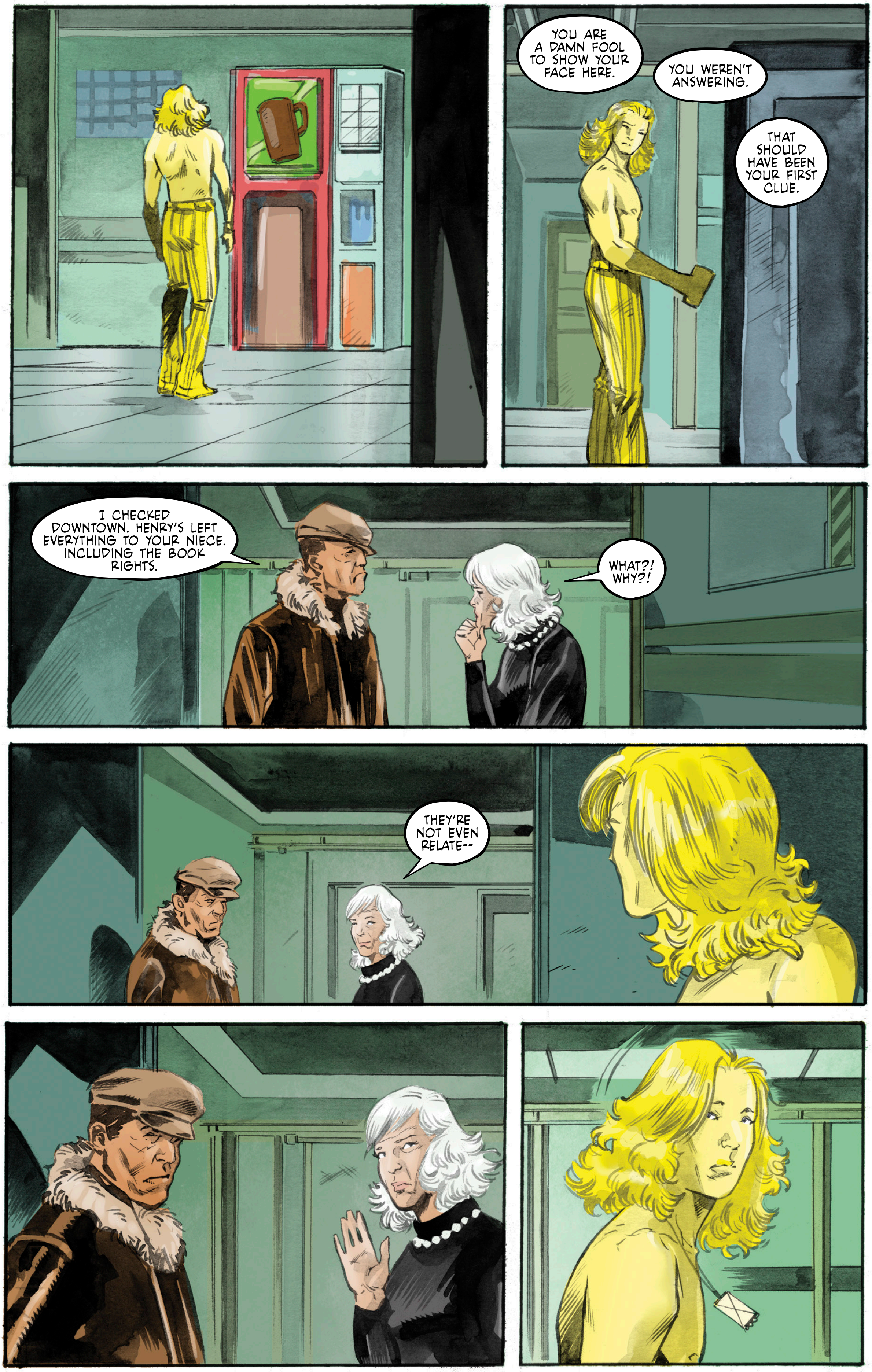

GRAAAAAAGH!
GRAAAAAAGH!
WORDS. WARDS. WEIRDS.
I'D FORGOTTEN HOW LOUD YOUR BIRTHS ARE.
BARD?

NO... THOU ART SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY.
YET THOU CARRY HIS FACE, LITTLE ECHO. WHY IS THAT?
BOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING.
I SEE THOU HAST HIS WIT! NO WONDER MAN THINKS THEE HIM.
MAN WHOSE MIND FOREVER BLURS THE CHAOS OF LIFE INTO CONCRETE CATEGORIES; REFLECTION BECOMING THE THING IN ITSELF; DEFINIENDUMB AND DEFINIENDEE FEATHERED TOGETHER BY BLACK CROW.
THUS, I WAS NOT MISTAKEN! THOU ART THE BARD! FOR MAN'S MEMORY, RESHAPING WHAT WAS, HATH RECREATED HIM IN THEE.
NO? THOU DISAGREE? THOU DOST NOT BELIEVE THE PAST MALLEABLE, A SHARED DELUSION, MORPHING AND CHANGING ON THE WHIM OF ITS AUDIENCE?
THOU MUST AGREE THAT IN SPEAKING THE PAST, WE CHANGE IT. THAT IN ECHOING HIM, THOU BECOMEST HIM. THAT THOU, THEREFORE, ART THINE OWN CREATOR: BOTH FATHER AND SON TO THYSELF, FREED OF THE SHACKLES OF TIME. IMMORTAL. A BRIDGE BETWEEN OUR WORLD AND THEIRS, THE ONE BEYOND.
A WORLD MAN MIGHT FIND IF ONLY HE KNEW TO LISTEN FOR IT.
"THE REST IS SILENCE."
DIDST THOU BELIEVE MAN CAPABLE OF HEEDING THY WARNING? THAT THEY MIGHT FOLLOW THEE? THAT THEY MIGHT RECOGNIZE THEIR OWN REFLECTION IN THEE, BREAK FREE FROM CONCRETE CATEGORIES, AND FLY FREE OF THE FLY BOTTLE?
THOU GIVEST MAN MORE CREDIT THAN HE DESERVES.
HE WAS TOO BUSY SPEAKING THY WARNING TO HEAR IT.

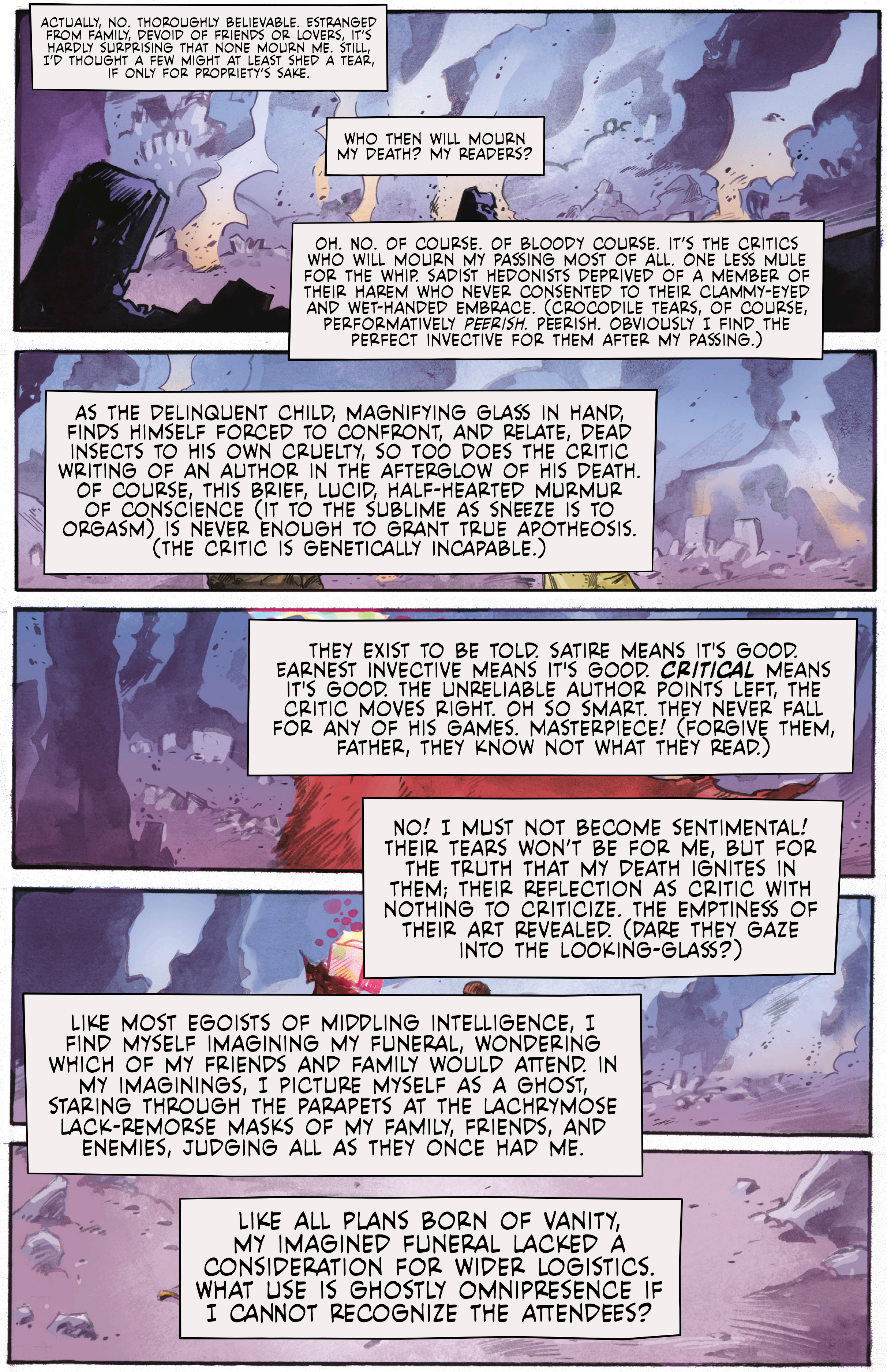

FOR THAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH SILENCE, LITTLE SCRIVENER...
...IT CAN BE FILLED.
AAAGH!
COME, LET US PAINT A SYMPHONY.

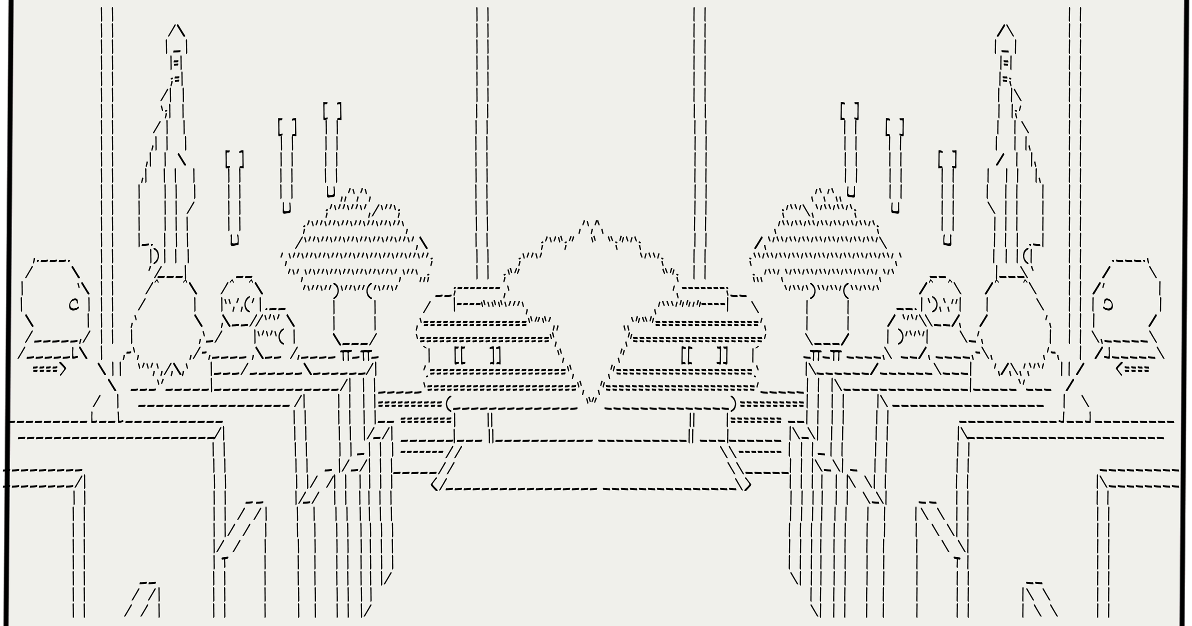

...JILL.
I'M SO SORRY.
DON'T BE. I'M JUST TIRED.
ARE YOU SURE?
I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT.
YOU SHOULD.
TALKING ABOUT IT HELPS.
TALKING ABOUT IT HELPS?!


I SPENT MY ENTIRE LIFE LISTENING TO DAD AND HENRY TALK TALK TALK.
TALK THEMSELVES INTO BOTHER. TALK THEMSELVES OUT OF BOTHER. JUST ENDLESS DESTRUCTIVE NOISE THAT FED ON ITSELF AND ACHIEVED NOTHING.
AND NOW THEY'RE BOTH *DEAD.*
SO, *NO.* EVERY THOUGHT DOESN'T NEED SHARING. EVERY CONVERSATION DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THERAPY. WE DON'T NEED TO OBSESSIVELY IMPROVE OURSELVES EVERY FUCKING SECOND OF EVERY FUCKING DAY!
I UNDERSTAND YOU'RE FEELING--
STOP TELLING ME WHAT I'M THINKING! NOBODY TALKS LIKE THAT! YOU SOUND LIKE A FUCKING CARTOON CHARACTER! YOU NEVER SHUT UP!
AND WHY SHOULD YOU?! YOU'RE THE MUSE. YOU'RE BASICALLY THE GOD OF TALKING. WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF KEEPING SILENT? OF NOT SAYING ANYTHING? OF NOT SHARING HOW YOU FEEL?
YOU'RE AN IDIOT.


YOU ARE A DAMN FOOL TO SHOW YOUR FACE HERE.
YOU WEREN'T ANSWERING.
THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN YOUR FIRST CLUE.
I CHECKED DOWNTOWN. HENRY'S LEFT EVERYTHING TO YOUR NIECE. INCLUDING THE BOOK RIGHTS.
WHAT?! WHY?!
THEY'RE NOT EVEN RELATE--

NOT A SINGLE TEAR. NOT A SINGLE ONE.
UNBELIEVABLE.


ACTUALLY, NO. THOROUGHLY BELIEVABLE. ESTRANGED FROM FAMILY, DEVOID OF FRIENDS OR LOVERS, IT'S HARDLY SURPRISING THAT NONE MOURN ME. STILL, I'D THOUGHT A FEW MIGHT AT LEAST SHED A TEAR, IF ONLY FOR PROPRIETY'S SAKE.
WHO THEN WILL MOURN MY DEATH? MY READERS?
OH. NO. OF COURSE. OF BLOODY COURSE. IT'S THE CRITICS WHO WILL MOURN MY PASSING MOST OF ALL. ONE LESS MULE FOR THE WHIP. SADIST HEDONISTS DEPRIVED OF A MEMBER OF THEIR HAREM WHO NEVER CONSENTED TO THEIR CLAMMY-EYED AND WET-HANDED EMBRACE. (CROCODILE TEARS, OF COURSE, PERFORMATIVELY *PEERISH*. PEERISH. OBVIOUSLY I FIND THE PERFECT INVECTIVE FOR THEM AFTER MY PASSING.)
AS THE DELINQUENT CHILD, MAGNIFYING GLASS IN HAND, FINDS HIMSELF FORCED TO CONFRONT, AND RELATE, DEAD INSECTS TO HIS OWN CRUELTY, SO TOO DOES THE CRITIC WRITING OF AN AUTHOR IN THE AFTERGLOW OF HIS DEATH. OF COURSE, THIS BRIEF, LUCID, HALF-HEARTED MURMUR OF CONSCIENCE (IT TO THE SUBLIME AS SNEEZE IS TO ORGASM) IS NEVER ENOUGH TO GRANT TRUE APOTHEOSIS. (THE CRITIC IS GENETICALLY INCAPABLE.)
THEY EXIST TO BE TOLD. SATIRE MEANS IT'S GOOD. EARNEST INVECTIVE MEANS IT'S GOOD. ***CRITICAL*** MEANS IT'S GOOD. THE UNRELIABLE AUTHOR POINTS LEFT, THE CRITIC MOVES RIGHT. OH SO SMART. THEY NEVER FALL FOR ANY OF HIS GAMES. MASTERPIECE! (FORGIVE THEM, FATHER, THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY READ.)
NO! I MUST NOT BECOME SENTIMENTAL! THEIR TEARS WON'T BE FOR ME, BUT FOR THE TRUTH THAT MY DEATH IGNITES IN THEM; THEIR REFLECTION AS CRITIC WITH NOTHING TO CRITICIZE. THE EMPTINESS OF THEIR ART REVEALED. (DARE THEY GAZE INTO THE LOOKING-GLASS?)
LIKE MOST EGOISTS OF MIDDLING INTELLIGENCE, I FIND MYSELF IMAGINING MY FUNERAL, WONDERING WHICH OF MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY WOULD ATTEND. IN MY IMAGININGS, I PICTURE MYSELF AS A GHOST, STARING THROUGH THE PARAPETS AT THE LACHRYMOSE LACK-REMORSE MASKS OF MY FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND ENEMIES, JUDGING ALL AS THEY ONCE HAD ME.
LIKE ALL PLANS BORN OF VANITY, MY IMAGINED FUNERAL LACKED A CONSIDERATION FOR WIDER LOGISTICS. WHAT USE IS GHOSTLY OMNIPRESENCE IF I CANNOT RECOGNIZE THE ATTENDEES?



BEHOLD, THAT EMPTY FACE IN THE FRONT ROW. SAD BUT VACANT. (ARE THEY SAD I HAVE GONE? OR SAD THAT I HAD NEVER BEEN? OR WAS IT SOME SYMBIOSIS OF THESE TWO ENDS -- THE ME THEY MISSED I HAD ONCE BEEN, ONLY TO BE REPLACED WITH AGE INTO A NOT-ME, WHOSE PASSING INTO A NOT-NOT-ME (OBLIVION OF OBLIVION), REKINDLED FORMER FEELINGS OF PRE-NOT-ME, ACTUAL ME? OR PERHAPS MY PASSING REKINDLED NOTHING, AND THEIR BLANK FACE IS JUST A BLANK FACE?) (HOW CAN I FATHOM A PERSON'S INNER FEELINGS IF I DON'T KNOW THEIR NAME?)

AND WHAT OF THE CHILD IN THE ROW BEHIND, KICKING THE CHAIR OF HE-OR-SHE OF AFOREMENTIONED VACANT FACE? (KICKING UNLIKELY THE CAUSE OF BLANK FACE'S SADNESS. HOW MINUSCULE MY PASSING IF A CHILD'S KICKING COULD COMPARE!) WHY IS THIS CHILD IN THE SECOND ROW OF MY FUNERAL? WHO IS HE? WHERE ARE HIS PARENTS? WHO ARE HIS PARENTS?

AND WHAT IF WE FLOAT FURTHER BACK, BEYOND THE OBLIGATORIES, INTO THE OPTIONALS; TO FIND READERS OF MINE WHO HAVE SOMEHOW SNUCK IN? THEY WILL BE OF A SINGULAR TYPE; THOSE WHO COMPLIMENT ME INCESSANTLY UPON FIRST MEETING BUT WHO, WITHOUT FAIL, AFTER GAINING MY INTIMACY AND TRUST, DEIGN TO OVERSHARE WITH ME THEIR INNER STRUGGLES. (AS IF WE ARE SOMEHOW BONDED. AS IF MY WORK TOUCHING THEM WILL ENABLE THEIR STRUGGLES TO SIMILARLY TOUCH ME. OR -- WORSE YET -- IF MY WORK TOUCHING THEM SOMEHOW ***QUALIFIES*** ME TO HELP THEM WITH THEIR OWN PAIN.) MY REACTION TO THESE CREATURES WAS FOREVER THE SAME -- I WOULD INSTANTLY FORGET ALL OF THIS HEART-VOMIT, OFTEN BEFORE I HEARD IT (SO OF A TYPE WAS IT THAT I RARELY NEEDED TO LISTEN TO SPECIFICS). THE TREACHEROUS FACE WHICH SPEWED IT WAS ALSO SIMILARLY FORGOTTEN. SO, WHAT HOPE WOULD I HAVE, YEARS LATER, OF RECONJURING SUCH NONENTITIES?

AND WHAT OF THOSE (APPARENTLY DYSLEXIC) SELF-DECLARED FORMER LOVERS WHO, MISTAKING AMUSEMENT FOR A-MUSE-MEANT (SMALL M), WOULD INEVITABLY ATTEND TO PROSTRATE THEMSELVES BEFORE THE CROWD; DECLARING THEMSELVES MY HIDDEN MISTRESS (AND IN SOME RARE, ANDROGYNOUS CASES, WITH ADMITTEDLY DANGEROUS AGE GAPS, THE MALE EQUIVALENT) DESPITE MY PERPETUAL BACHELORHOOD REMOVING ANY NEED FOR SECRECY? THEY WHO WOULD REVEAL TO ALL PRESENT WHO DARED TO LOOK CLOSER (NONE WOULD, NEGATING THE CONCERN) MY SIGNIFICANCE TO THEM OSCILLATING BETWEEN THEIR FANTASIES OF IDOL, LOVER, AND MONSTER. (BUT NEVER AS PERSON, NEVER MORE THAN A RESOURCE FOR MY JADED LOVERS' PURSUIT OF SELF-ESTEEM; FOREVER THE VILLAIN FOR TREATING THEM AS THEY TREATED ME -- AS SOMETHING TO FUCK TO FEEL LESS ALONE.)

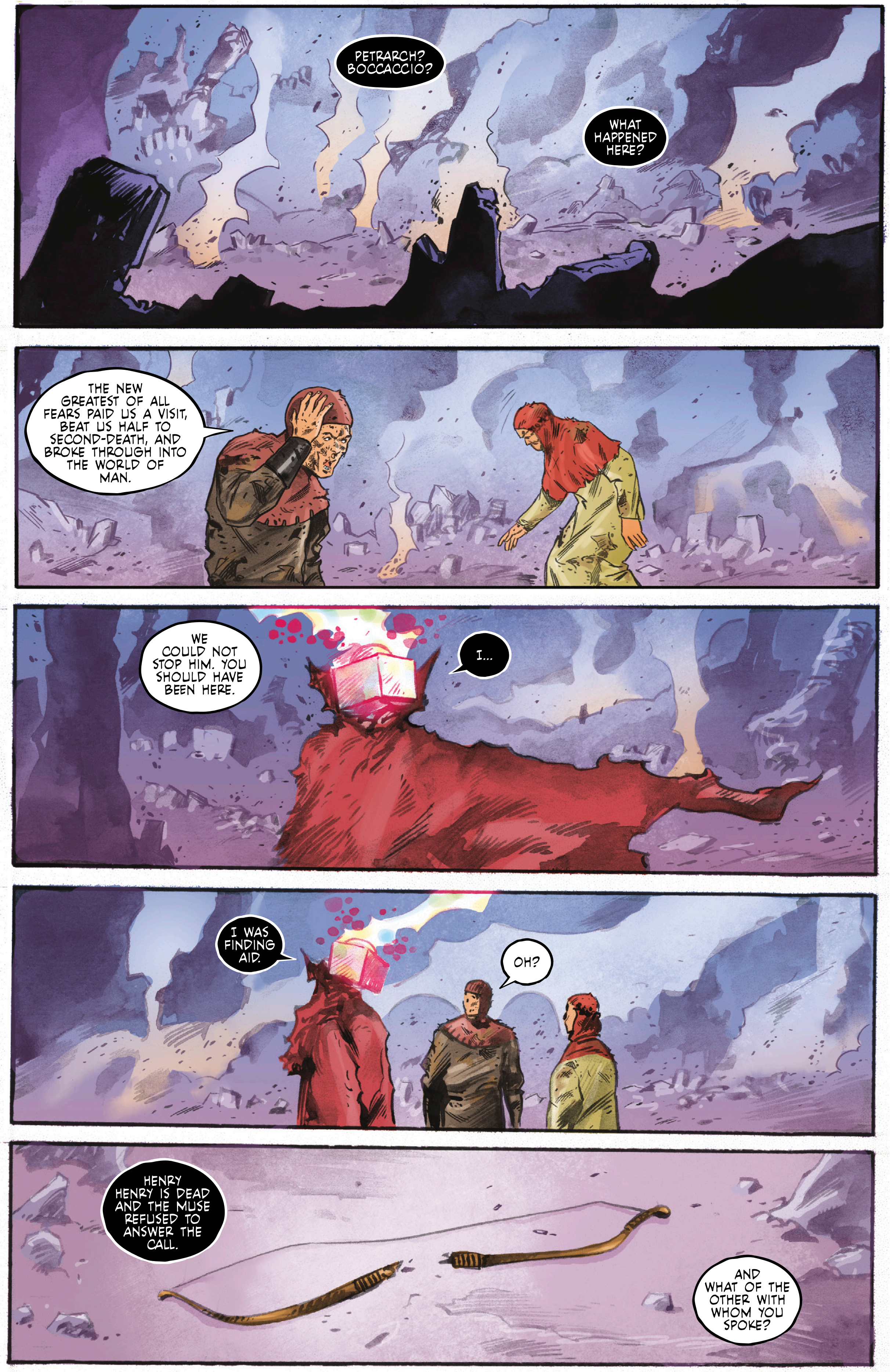
[THOSE READERS I ADORE, WHO STAY AWAY FROM ME, WHO BUY MY BOOKS, WHO THINK POORLY OF MY CONTEMPORARIES, AND WHO ARGUE ONLINE WITH MY CRITICS, I WOULD NOT HAVE TO CONCERN MYSELF WITH. THEY WOULD KNOW NOT TO ATTEND. THEY, ROMANTIC BUT NOT TO EITHER OF THE POSHLOST EXTREMES OUTLINED ABOVE, MIGHT PERMIT THEMSELVES A BRIEF STROLL THROUGH MY GRAVEYARD, YEARS AFTER MY PASSING, TO GIFT MY RESTING PLACE A GLANCE AS BRIEF AS THEIR STUDIES OF MY WORK WERE LONG.]

NO. IT SIMPLY WON'T DO. A GHOST LACKS THE OMNISCIENCE TO KNOW, AND THE OMNIPOTENCE TO DISCERN EACH ANONYMOUS ADMIRER. MY OWN FUNERAL, EXPERIENCED THUSLY, WOULD BE INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THAT OF A STRANGER. (AND THEREFORE SOMETHING I COULD EXPERIENCE WITHOUT DEFYING THE LAWS OF PHYSICS BY MAKING MYSELF CORPOREAL.) ACCORDINGLY, I COULD CONSIDER THIS IDLE CONJECTURE MERE CREATIVE INDULGENCE, A NECESSARY EVIL OF MY VOCATION, TO BE DISMISSED, FONDLY, ON THE ROAD TO GREATER REWARDS.

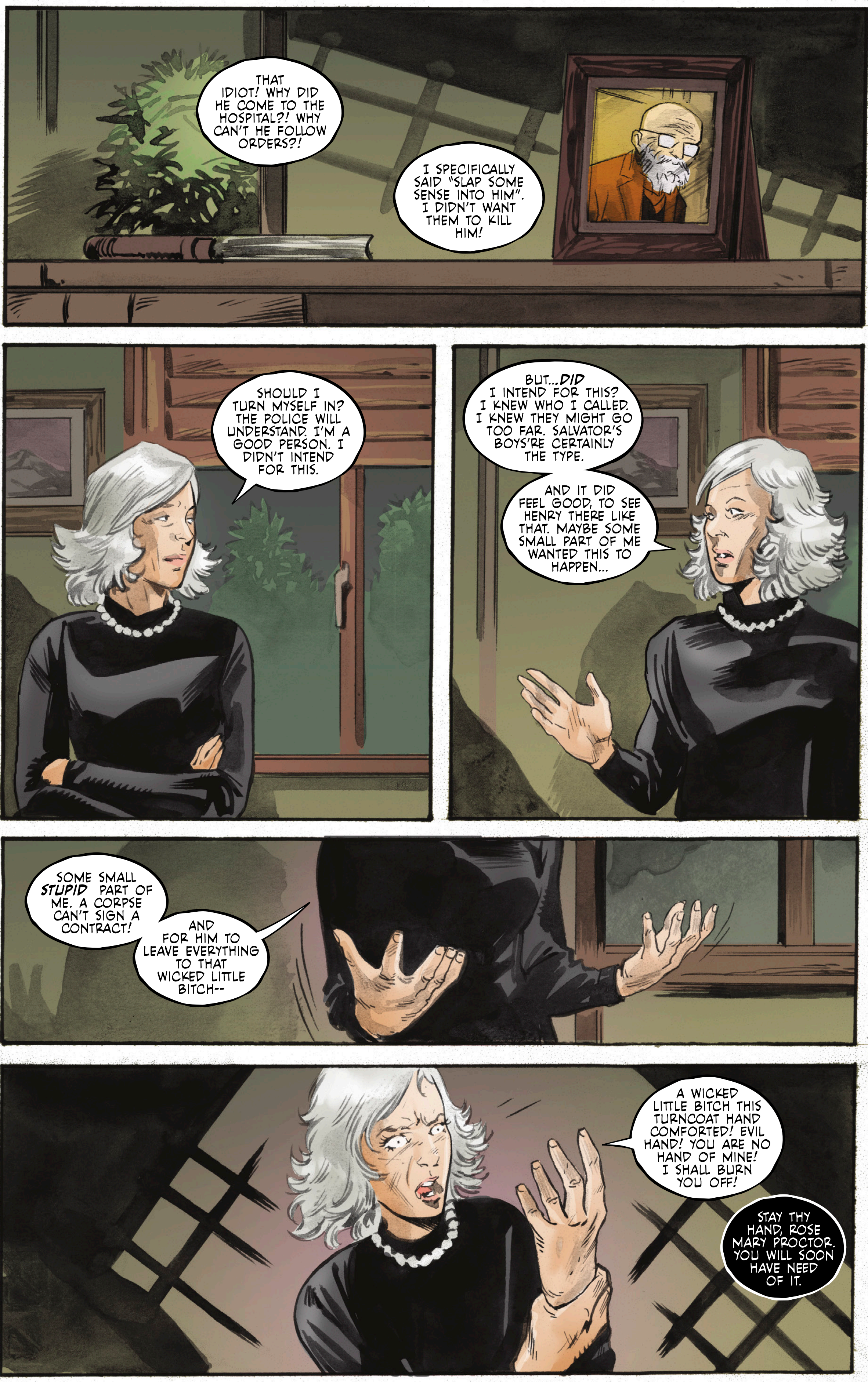
HAVING NOW BEEN A GHOST OF SORTS, PRESIDING OVER THE CLOSEST THING I SHALL HAVE TO A FUNERAL, I REALIZE ALL OF THE ABOVE IS EVEN LESS OF A CONCERN THAN I FIRST THOUGHT. FOR NOT ONLY WAS MY IMAGINATION (A WRITER'S CHIEF SOURCE OF PRIDE) THOROUGHLY INADEQUATE IN ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE, I ALSO LACKED ANY OF THE PREREQUISITE FRIENDS, FAMILY, OR EVEN GRANDSTANDING ENEMIES, THAT MIGHT ATTEND SUCH AN EVENT.

EXCEPT YOU.

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING MY FUNERAL, READER. YOU, AND YOU ALONE, HAVE MADE MY PASSING THAT LITTLE BIT BRIGHTER.


PETRARCH? BOCCACCIO?
WHAT HAPPENED HERE?
THE NEW GREATEST OF ALL FEARS PAID US A VISIT, BEAT US HALF TO SECOND-DEATH, AND BROKE THROUGH INTO THE WORLD OF MAN.
WE COULD NOT STOP HIM. YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE.
I...
I WAS FINDING AID.
OH?
HENRY HENRY IS DEAD AND THE MUSE REFUSED TO ANSWER THE CALL.
AND WHAT OF THE OTHER WITH WHOM YOU SPOKE?

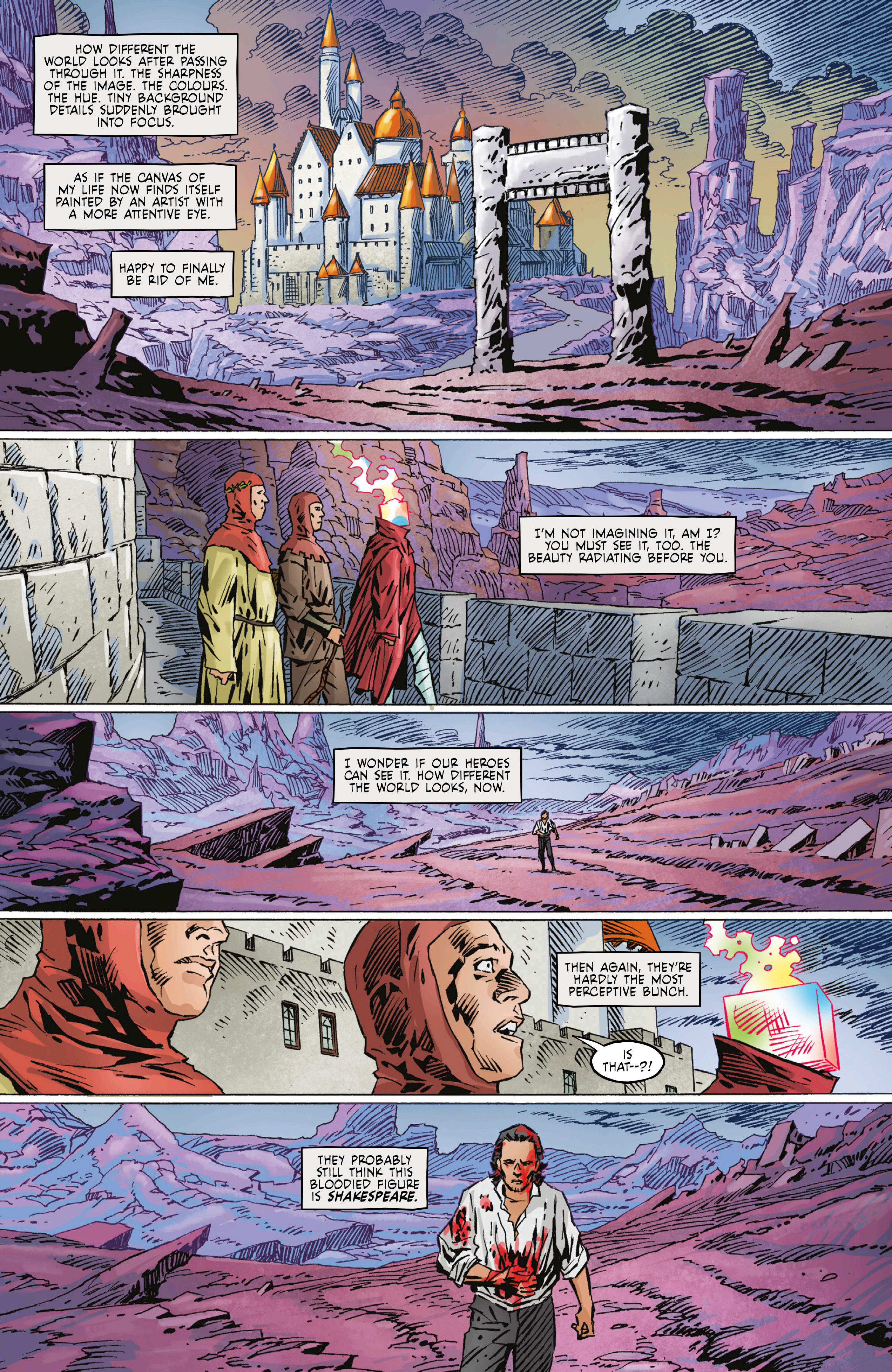
WHAT OF THE FORMER STORYTELLER FROM THE DARK CAGES? THE LORD OF ARDEN? FRIEND OF MAN AND FAE FOLK ALIKE? DID YOU FIND HIM? WILL HE AID US?
HERO?
WHAT OF THE BARD?

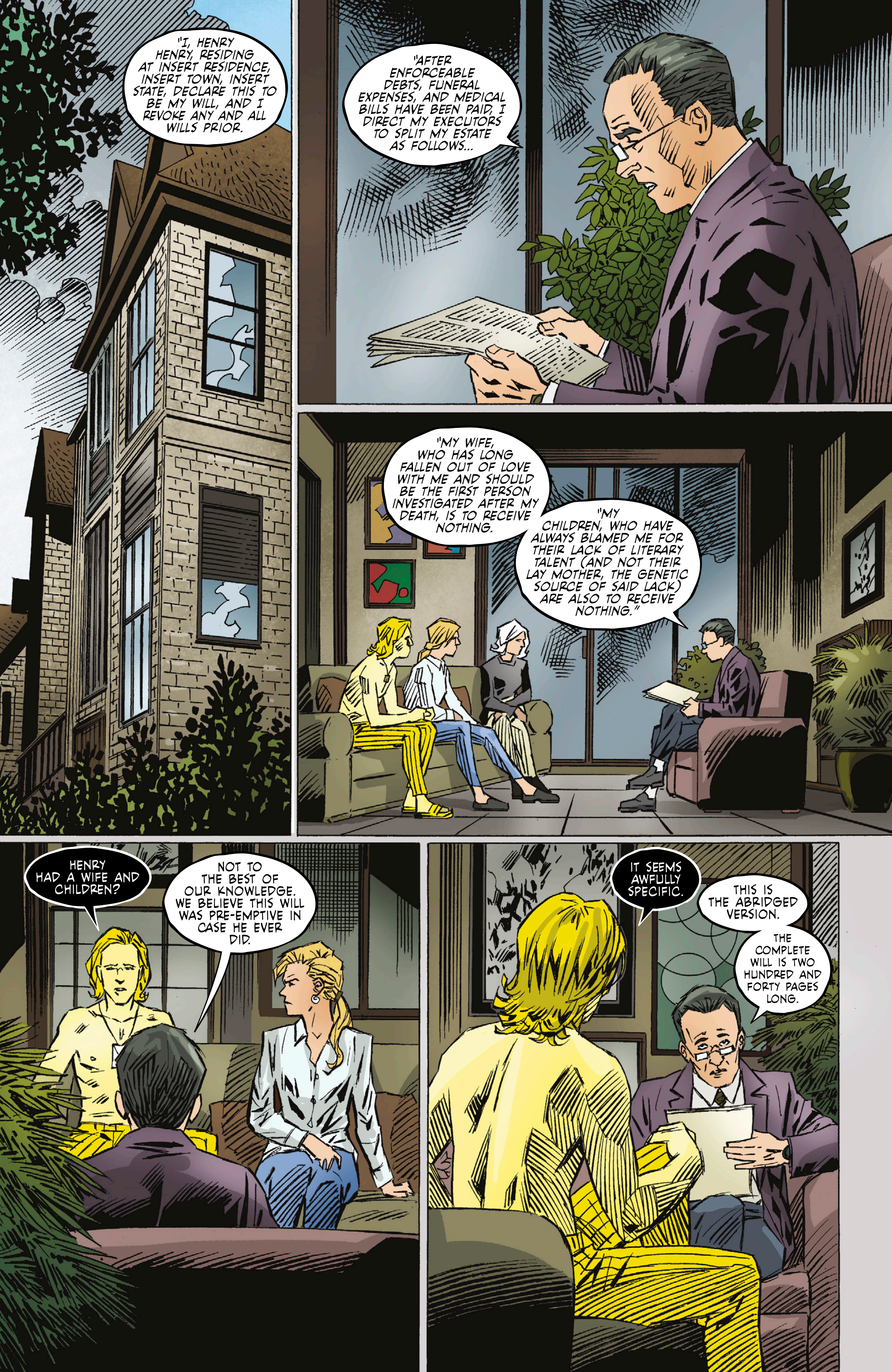

THAT IDIOT! WHY DID HE COME TO THE HOSPITAL?! WHY CAN'T HE FOLLOW ORDERS?!
I SPECIFICALLY SAID "SLAP SOME SENSE INTO HIM". I DIDN'T WANT THEM TO KILL HIM!
SHOULD I TURN MYSELF IN? THE POLICE WILL UNDERSTAND. I'M A GOOD PERSON. I DIDN'T INTEND FOR THIS.
BUT...DID I INTEND FOR THIS? I KNEW WHO I CALLED. I KNEW THEY MIGHT GO TOO FAR. SALVATOR'S BOYS'RE CERTAINLY THE TYPE.
AND IT DID FEEL GOOD, TO SEE HENRY THERE LIKE THAT. MAYBE SOME SMALL PART OF ME WANTED THIS TO HAPPEN...
SOME SMALL STUPID PART OF ME. A CORPSE CAN'T SIGN A CONTRACT!
AND FOR HIM TO LEAVE EVERYTHING TO THAT WICKED LITTLE BITCH--
A WICKED LITTLE BITCH THIS TURNCOAT HAND COMFORTED! EVIL HAND! YOU ARE NO HAND OF MINE! I SHALL BURN YOU OFF!
STAY THY HAND, ROSE MARY PROCTOR. YOU WILL SOON HAVE NEED OF IT.

MY LIFE IS A CAVALCADE OF CARROLLIAN CASTOFFS.
WHAT DO YOU WANT, CREATURE? MY CONFESSION?
NO.
THEN WHY ARE YOU HERE?
FOR THE GIFT THOU GRANT ALL THY CLIENTS.
TERROR FORMING II
IMMORTALITY.
II

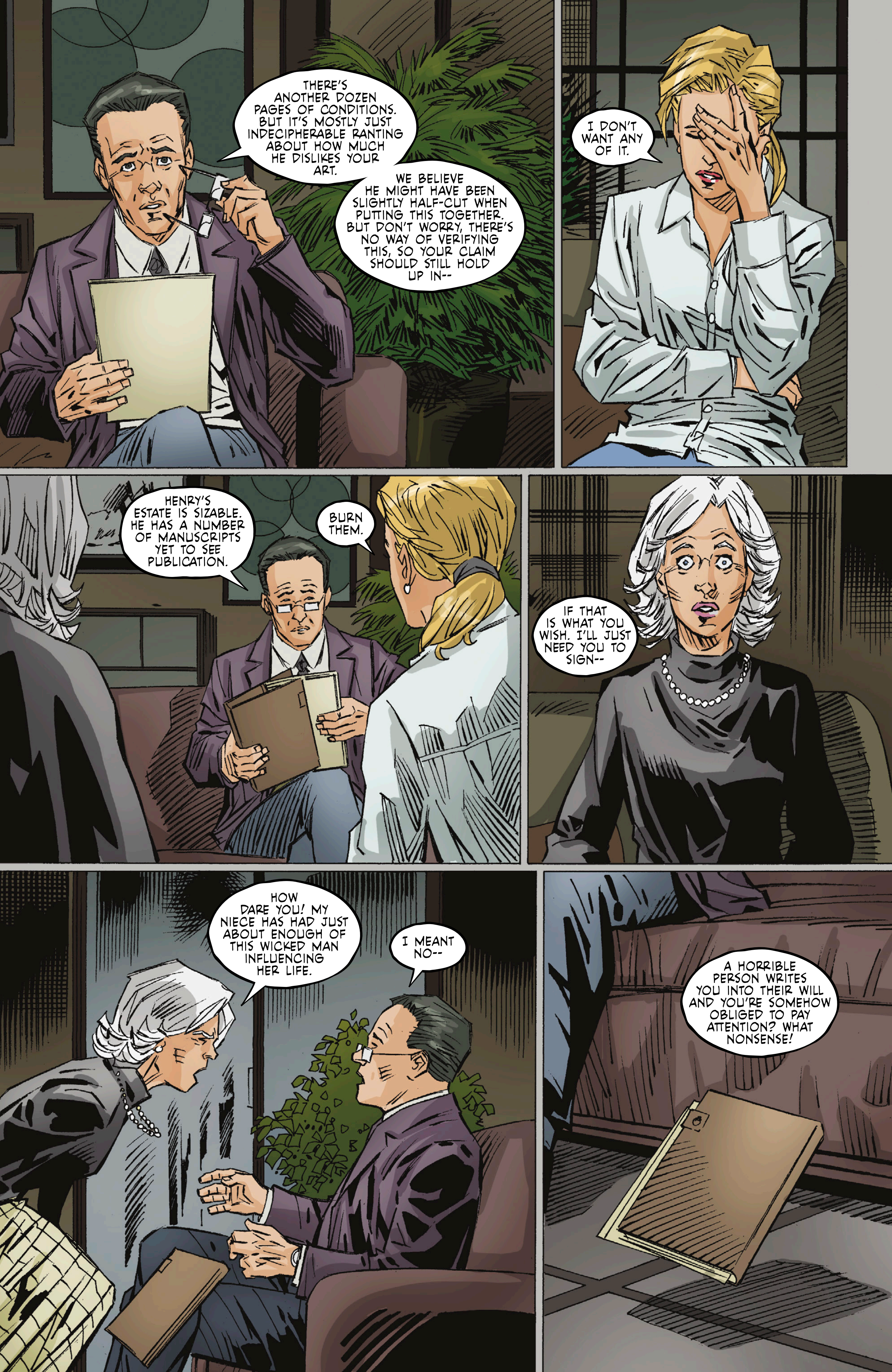
END CHAPTER TWO

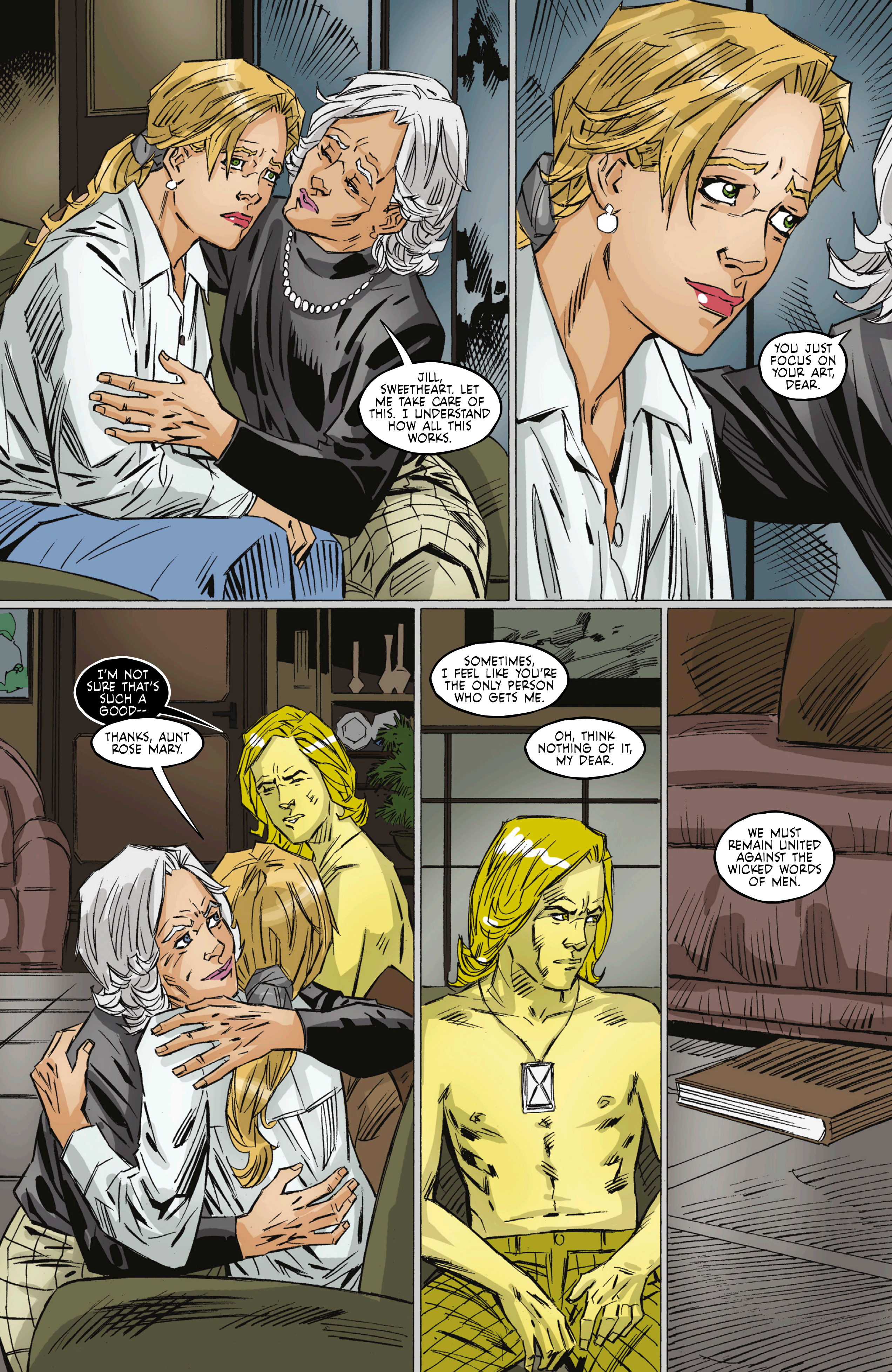
CHAPTER THREE


HOW DIFFERENT THE WORLD LOOKS AFTER PASSING THROUGH IT. THE SHARPNESS OF THE IMAGE. THE COLOURS. THE HUE. TINY BACKGROUND DETAILS SUDDENLY BROUGHT INTO FOCUS.
AS IF THE CANVAS OF MY LIFE NOW FINDS ITSELF PAINTED BY AN ARTIST WITH A MORE ATTENTIVE EYE.
HAPPY TO FINALLY BE RID OF ME.
I'M NOT IMAGINING IT, AM I? YOU MUST SEE IT, TOO. THE BEAUTY RADIATING BEFORE YOU.
I WONDER IF OUR HEROES CAN SEE IT. HOW DIFFERENT THE WORLD LOOKS, NOW.
THEN AGAIN, THEY'RE HARDLY THE MOST PERCEPTIVE BUNCH.
IS THAT--?!
THEY PROBABLY STILL THINK THIS BLOODIED FIGURE IS ***SHAKESPEARE.***

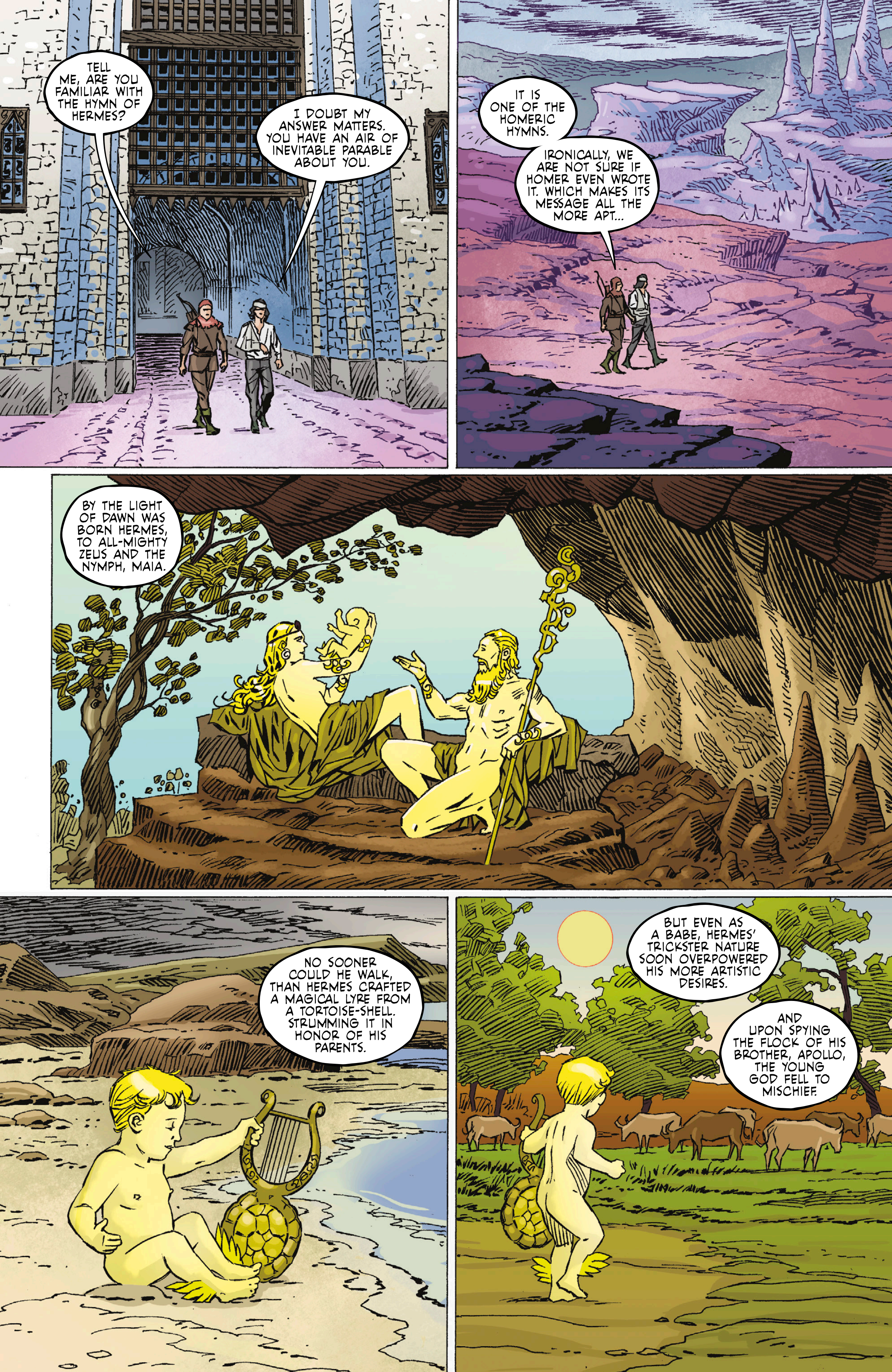

"I, HENRY HENRY, RESIDING AT INSERT RESIDENCE, INSERT TOWN, INSERT STATE, DECLARE THIS TO BE MY WILL, AND I REVOKE ANY AND ALL WILLS PRIOR.
"AFTER ENFORCEABLE DEBTS, FUNERAL EXPENSES, AND MEDICAL BILLS HAVE BEEN PAID, I DIRECT MY EXECUTORS TO SPLIT MY ESTATE AS FOLLOWS...
"MY WIFE, WHO HAS LONG FALLEN OUT OF LOVE WITH ME AND SHOULD BE THE FIRST PERSON INVESTIGATED AFTER MY DEATH, IS TO RECEIVE NOTHING.
"MY CHILDREN, WHO HAVE ALWAYS BLAMED ME FOR THEIR LACK OF LITERARY TALENT (AND NOT THEIR LAY MOTHER, THE GENETIC SOURCE OF SAID LACK) ARE ALSO TO RECEIVE NOTHING."
HENRY HAD A WIFE AND CHILDREN?
NOT TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE. WE BELIEVE THIS WILL WAS PRE-EMPTIVE IN CASE HE EVER DID.
IT SEEMS AWFULLY SPECIFIC.
THIS IS THE ABRIDGED VERSION.
THE COMPLETE WILL IS TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY PAGES LONG.

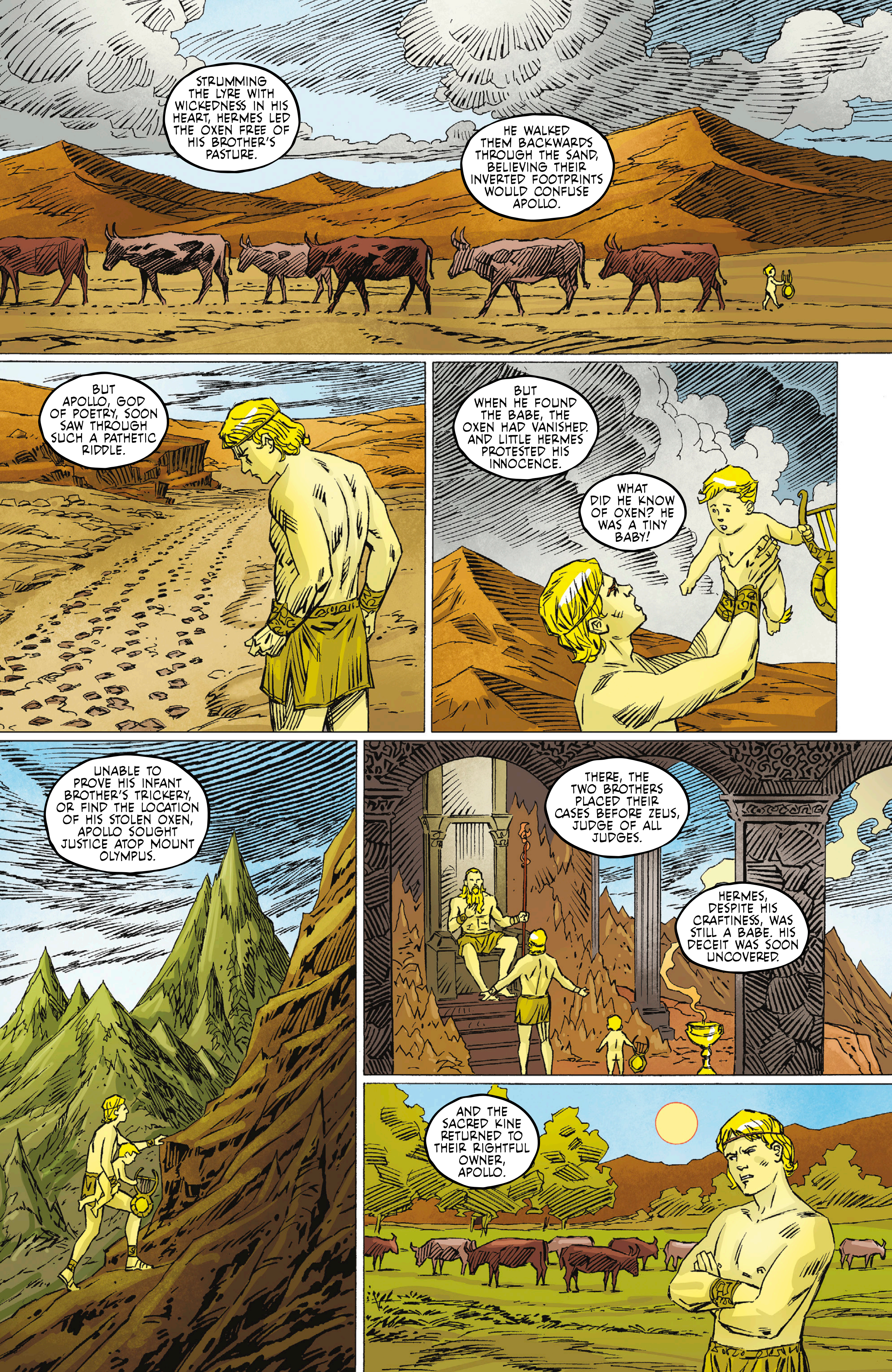
SORRY. THERE'S QUITE A FEW PAGES.
I THINK HE IMAGINED HIMSELF MARRYING SOMEONE QUITE DEVIOUS.
AH, YES. HERE WE ARE.
"REGRETTABLY, I MUST LEAVE MY ESTATE IN THE HANDS OF JILL PROCTOR.
"WHO, DESPITE NOT BEING MY NEXT OF KIN, IS THE ONLY PERSON I KNOW POSSESSING THE SLIGHTEST MODICUM OF CREATIVE TALENT. (ALBEIT IN A VISUAL MEDIUM.)"

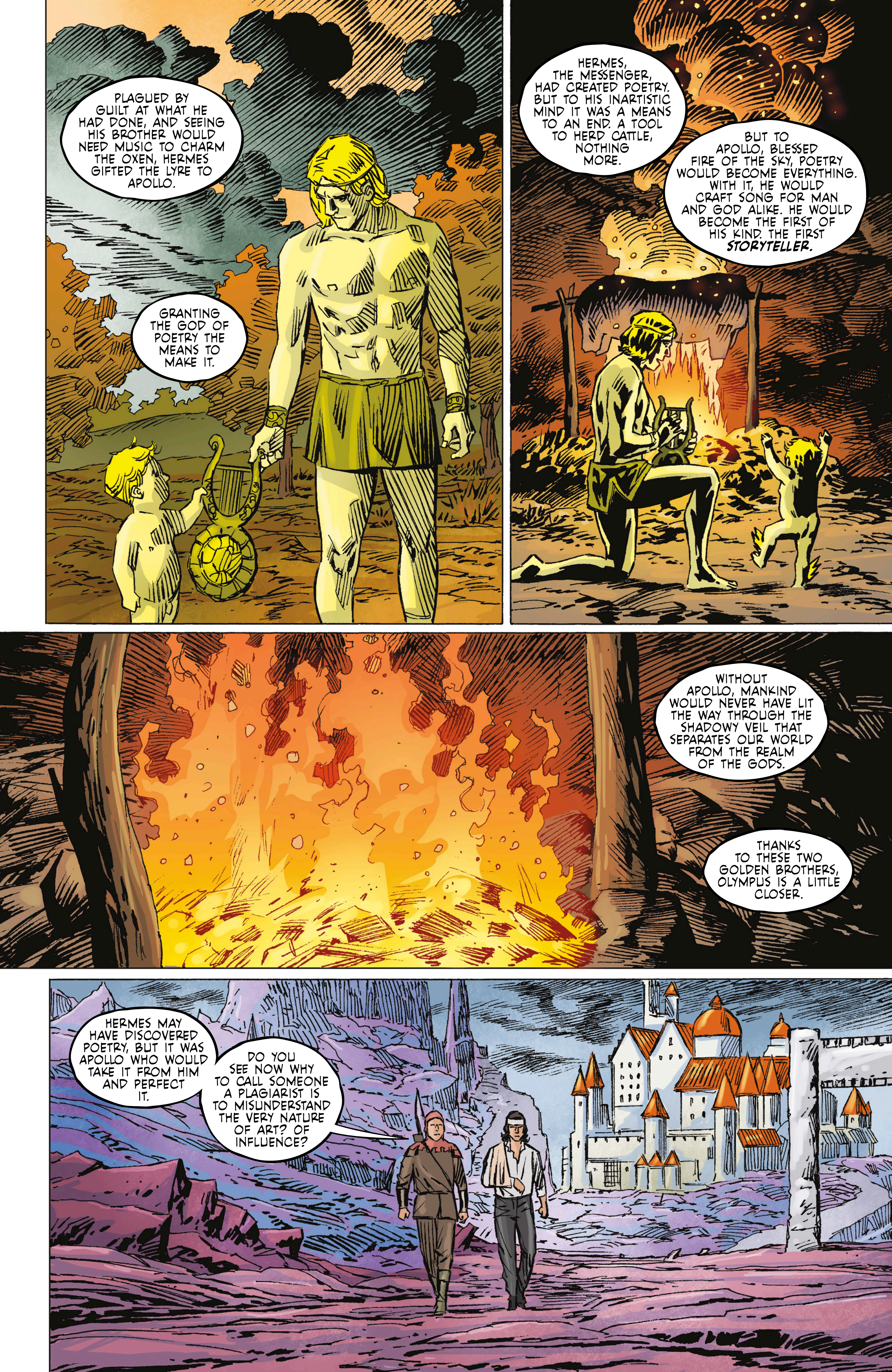

THERE'S ANOTHER DOZEN PAGES OF CONDITIONS. BUT IT'S MOSTLY JUST INDECIPHERABLE RANTING ABOUT HOW MUCH HE DISLIKES YOUR ART.
WE BELIEVE HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN SLIGHTLY HALF-CUT WHEN PUTTING THIS TOGETHER. BUT DON'T WORRY, THERE'S NO WAY OF VERIFYING THIS, SO YOUR CLAIM SHOULD STILL HOLD UP IN--
I DON'T WANT ANY OF IT.
HENRY'S ESTATE IS SIZABLE. HE HAS A NUMBER OF MANUSCRIPTS YET TO SEE PUBLICATION.
BURN THEM.
IF THAT IS WHAT YOU WISH. I'LL JUST NEED YOU TO SIGN--
HOW DARE YOU! MY NIECE HAS HAD JUST ABOUT ENOUGH OF THIS WICKED MAN INFLUENCING HER LIFE.
I MEANT NO--
A HORRIBLE PERSON WRITES YOU INTO THEIR WILL AND YOU'RE SOMEHOW OBLIGED TO PAY ATTENTION? WHAT NONSENSE!


JILL, SWEETHEART. LET ME TAKE CARE OF THIS. I UNDERSTAND HOW ALL THIS WORKS.
YOU JUST FOCUS ON YOUR ART, DEAR.
I'M NOT SURE THAT'S SUCH A GOOD--
THANKS, AUNT ROSE MARY.
SOMETIMES, I FEEL LIKE YOU'RE THE ONLY PERSON WHO GETS ME.
OH, THINK NOTHING OF IT, MY DEAR.
WE MUST REMAIN UNITED AGAINST THE WICKED WORDS OF MEN.

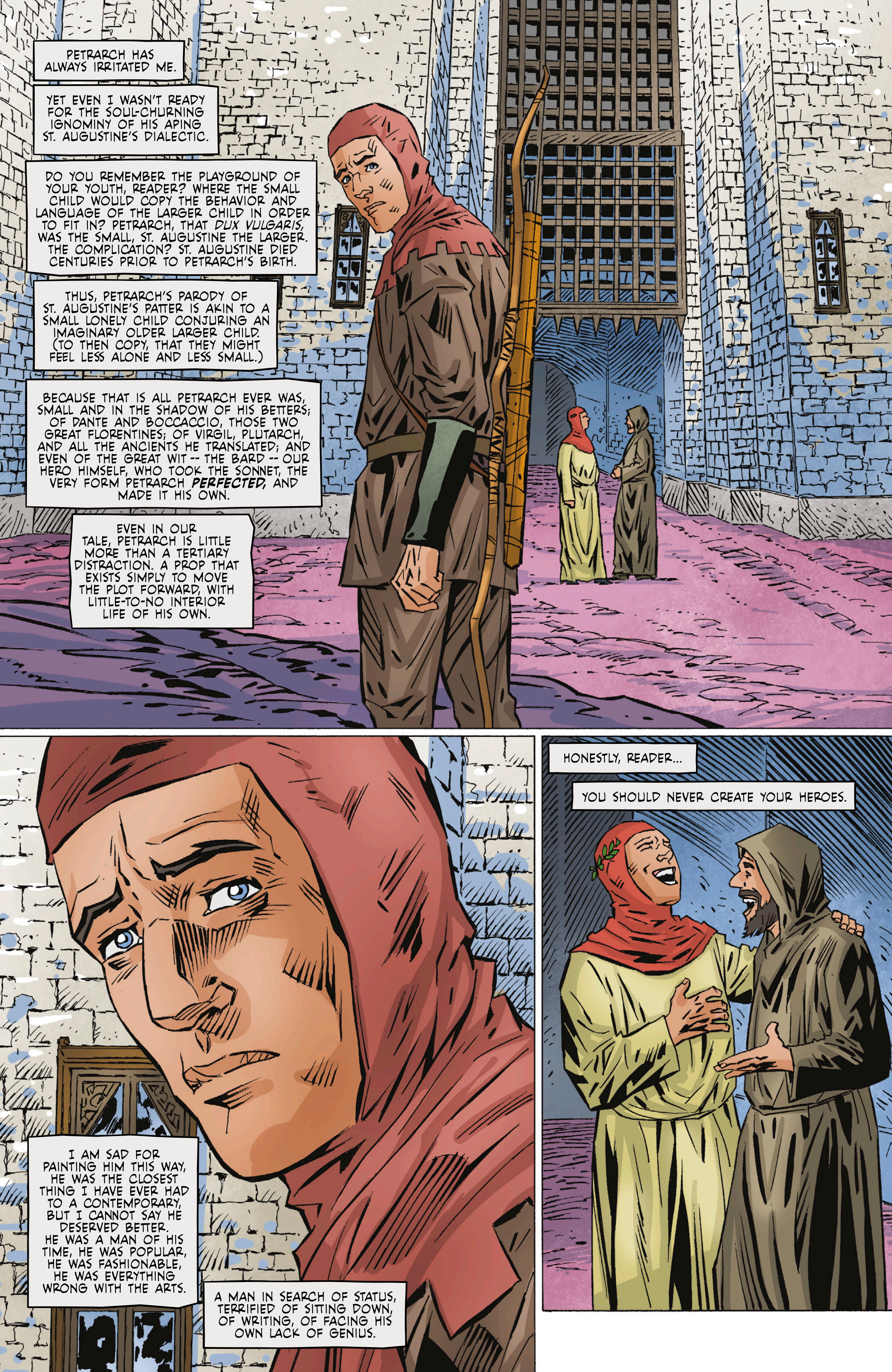
READER, A WORD OF ADVICE SHOULD YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF WRITING A LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT.
DO NOT SARCASTICALLY LEAVE EVERYTHING YOU OWN TO THE PERSON YOU HATE THE MOST.
IT WILL NOT BE THE POSTMORTEM GOTCHA YOU ENVISIONED.
I IMAGINE YOU DON'T MIND THIS SEQUEL CRISIS ALL THAT MUCH, AYE BARD?
WHAT WITH ALL YOUR EDWARDS AND RICHARDS.
ALL YOUR HENRYS.
THAT'S HIS NAME, THEN? THE PLAGIARIST WHO CAUSED ALL THIS?
PLAGIARIST...?
REMIND ME, BARD, HOW MANY OF YOUR PLAYS WERE YOUR OWN?
OF MINE? ALL, BY DEFINITION.
HOW MANY OF YOURS EXISTED, THEN?
OH, NOW THAT WOULD BE TELLING. I CANNOT.
THE SHOW MUST GO ON.


TELL ME, ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE HYMN OF HERMES?
I DOUBT MY ANSWER MATTERS. YOU HAVE AN AIR OF INEVITABLE PARABLE ABOUT YOU.
IT IS ONE OF THE HOMERIC HYMNS.
IRONICALLY, WE ARE NOT SURE IF HOMER EVEN WROTE IT. WHICH MAKES ITS MESSAGE ALL THE MORE APT...
BY THE LIGHT OF DAWN WAS BORN HERMES, TO ALL-MIGHTY ZEUS AND THE NYMPH, MAIA.
NO SOONER COULD HE WALK, THAN HERMES CRAFTED A MAGICAL LYRE FROM A TORTOISE-SHELL. STRUMMING IT IN HONOR OF HIS PARENTS.
BUT EVEN AS A BABE, HERMES' TRICKSTER NATURE SOON OVERPOWERED HIS MORE ARTISTIC DESIRES.
AND UPON SPYING THE FLOCK OF HIS BROTHER, APOLLO, THE YOUNG GOD FELL TO MISCHIEF.


STRUMMING THE LYRE WITH WICKEDNESS IN HIS HEART, HERMES LED THE OXEN FREE OF HIS BROTHER'S PASTURE.
HE WALKED THEM BACKWARDS THROUGH THE SAND, BELIEVING THEIR INVERTED FOOTPRINTS WOULD CONFUSE APOLLO.
BUT APOLLO, GOD OF POETRY, SOON SAW THROUGH SUCH A PATHETIC RIDDLE.
BUT WHEN HE FOUND THE BABE, THE OXEN HAD VANISHED. AND LITTLE HERMES PROTESTED HIS INNOCENCE.
WHAT DID HE KNOW OF OXEN? HE WAS A TINY BABY!
UNABLE TO PROVE HIS INFANT BROTHER'S TRICKERY, OR FIND THE LOCATION OF HIS STOLEN OXEN, APOLLO SOUGHT JUSTICE ATOP MOUNT OLYMPUS.
THERE, THE TWO BROTHERS PLACED THEIR CASES BEFORE ZEUS, JUDGE OF ALL JUDGES.
HERMES, DESPITE HIS CRAFTINESS, WAS STILL A BABE. HIS DECEIT WAS SOON UNCOVERED.
AND THE SACRED KINE RETURNED TO THEIR RIGHTFUL OWNER, APOLLO.


PLAGUED BY GUILT AT WHAT HE HAD DONE, AND SEEING HIS BROTHER WOULD NEED MUSIC TO CHARM THE OXEN, HERMES GIFTED THE LYRE TO APOLLO.
GRANTING THE GOD OF POETRY THE MEANS TO MAKE IT.
HERMES, THE MESSENGER, HAD CREATED POETRY. BUT TO HIS INARTISTIC MIND IT WAS A MEANS TO AN END. A TOOL TO HERD CATTLE, NOTHING MORE.
BUT TO APOLLO, BLESSED FIRE OF THE SKY, POETRY WOULD BECOME EVERYTHING. WITH IT, HE WOULD CRAFT SONG FOR MAN AND GOD ALIKE. HE WOULD BECOME THE FIRST OF HIS KIND. THE FIRST ***STORYTELLER.***
WITHOUT APOLLO, MANKIND WOULD NEVER HAVE LIT THE WAY THROUGH THE SHADOWY VEIL THAT SEPARATES OUR WORLD FROM THE REALM OF THE GODS.
THANKS TO THESE TWO GOLDEN BROTHERS, OLYMPUS IS A LITTLE CLOSER.
HERMES MAY HAVE DISCOVERED POETRY, BUT IT WAS APOLLO WHO WOULD TAKE IT FROM HIM AND PERFECT IT.
DO YOU SEE NOW WHY TO CALL SOMEONE A PLAGIARIST IS TO MISUNDERSTAND THE VERY NATURE OF ART? OF INFLUENCE?

I DISTRUST GODS AND GHOSTS BEARING GIFTS. I AM NO PLAGIARIST.
YOU ARE, AND IT'S YOUR GREATEST ASSET. TO STEAL THE THOUGHTS OF ANOTHER, AND TRANSLATE THEM FOR--
YOU ONLY BELIEVE THIS, FRANCESCO, BECAUSE YOU SACRIFICED YOUR ENTIRE LIFE TO TRANSLATING THE WORKS OF YOUR BETTERS.
YOU FAIL TO REALIZE THAT IN CHAMPIONING PLAGIARISM, YOU CHAMPION SEQUELS.
YOU ARE THE CAUSE OF THE VERY THING YOU SEEK TO FIGHT AGAINST.
AS AM I.

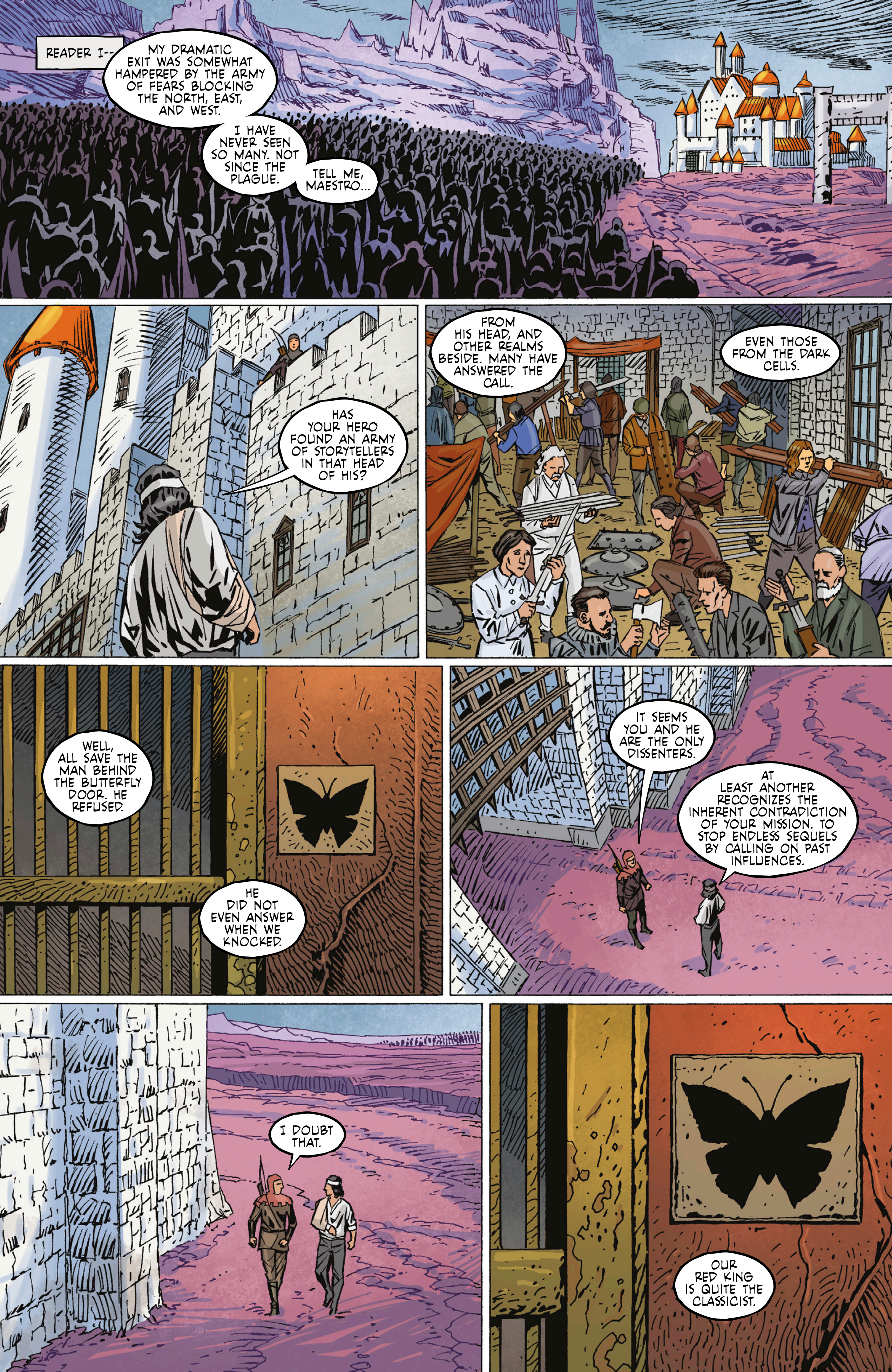

PETRARCH HAS ALWAYS IRRITATED ME.
YET EVEN I WASN'T READY FOR THE SOUL-CHURNING IGNOMINY OF HIS APING ST. AUGUSTINE'S DIALECTIC.
DO YOU REMEMBER THE PLAYGROUND OF YOUR YOUTH, READER? WHERE THE SMALL CHILD WOULD COPY THE BEHAVIOR AND LANGUAGE OF THE LARGER CHILD IN ORDER TO FIT IN? PETRARCH, THAT *DUX VULGARIS,* WAS THE SMALL, ST. AUGUSTINE THE LARGER. THE COMPLICATION? ST. AUGUSTINE DIED CENTURIES PRIOR TO PETRARCH'S BIRTH.
THUS, PETRARCH'S PARODY OF ST. AUGUSTINE'S PATTER IS AKIN TO A SMALL LONELY CHILD CONJURING AN IMAGINARY OLDER LARGER CHILD. (TO THEN COPY, THAT THEY MIGHT FEEL LESS ALONE AND LESS SMALL.)
BECAUSE THAT IS ALL PETRARCH EVER WAS, SMALL AND IN THE SHADOW OF HIS BETTERS; OF DANTE AND BOCCACCIO, THOSE TWO GREAT FLORENTINES; OF VIRGIL, PLUTARCH, AND ALL THE ANCIENTS HE TRANSLATED; AND EVEN OF THE GREAT WIT -- THE BARD -- OUR HERO HIMSELF, WHO TOOK THE SONNET, THE VERY FORM PETRARCH ***PERFECTED,*** AND MADE IT HIS OWN.
EVEN IN OUR TALE, PETRARCH IS LITTLE MORE THAN A TERTIARY DISTRACTION. A PROP THAT EXISTS SIMPLY TO MOVE THE PLOT FORWARD, WITH LITTLE-TO-NO INTERIOR LIFE OF HIS OWN.
I AM SAD FOR PAINTING HIM THIS WAY, HE WAS THE CLOSEST THING I HAVE EVER HAD TO A CONTEMPORARY, BUT I CANNOT SAY HE DESERVED BETTER. HE WAS A MAN OF HIS TIME, HE WAS POPULAR, HE WAS FASHIONABLE, HE WAS EVERYTHING WRONG WITH THE ARTS.
A MAN IN SEARCH OF STATUS, TERRIFIED OF SITTING DOWN, OF WRITING, OF FACING HIS OWN LACK OF GENIUS.
HONESTLY, READER...
YOU SHOULD NEVER CREATE YOUR HEROES.

INSTEAD, SURROUND YOURSELF WITH ENEMIES.
WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG.
HERMANN&HUMBERT
I DID IT! I WON! THE BOOK GOES ON SALE NEXT WEEK!
I'VE GOT BUYERS FROM EVERY MAJOR MARKET CLAMORING FOR THE RIGHTS TO--
...A-ARTHUR?!
THOUGHT I'D THROW ON A FAMILIAR FACE.
YOUR INTERNS DID NOT FIND MY NATURAL FORM APPEALING.
HIS PHOTO ON YOUR DESK. IT SPOKE TO ME.
HE WAS A TERRIFYING MAN. I FELT A GREAT KINSHIP WITH HIM.

I FEARED I WOULD NEVER SEE HIS FACE AGAIN.
THANK YOU.
AND TO THINK, THAT WRETCHED LITTLE BITCH WAS ABOUT TO SEND HIS HARD WORK TO THE INCINERATOR.
AS I HELD HER IN MY ARMS, ALL I COULD THINK OF WAS CRUSHING THE LIFE FROM HER!
STILL... NEEDS MUST. WITH THIS BOOK OUR--*MY* FAMILY'S NAME HAS BEEN REDEEMED.
WELL, NOT REDEEMED PER SE. NOT TO YOU OR ME. INTELLIGENT PEOPLE KNOW MY BROTHER'S "CRIMES" WERE JUST HOW THE WORLD WAS BACK THEN. YOU CAN'T REWRITE THE PAST, WHY PERSECUTE IT?
BUT NOW, WITH THIS BOOK, YOUR--ARTHUR'S PROTEGE, THE VERY BOY HE "ABUSED", HAS BECOME A LEGACY AUTHOR IN HIS OWN RIGHT!
I HAVE CREATED A DYNASTY. A STORY WITHOUT END. ALL TRACEABLE BACK TO ARTHUR!
TERROR FORMING II
NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE
A *LEGACY.* IS THERE A MORE ACCURSED WORD IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE?
LET US JUMP AHEAD TO THE REACTION. THE BLEATING OF OUR *RELATABLE* VILLAIN BUILT ON *CONTEMPORARY* CONCERNS HAS ME NAUSEOUS.

THE LEARNED READER, WELL AWARE OF THE PERFORMATIVE SOLIPSISM EXHIBITED BY YOUR HUMBLE NARRATOR IN TIMES PAST, WILL BE AMUSED TO FIND MY REACTION AT *TERROR FORMING II'S* SUCCESS TO BE ONE OF EARNEST DISGUST.
Heroes Journal Book Shop
TERROR FORMING II
I AM, WAS, A PROFESSIONAL WRITER, BUT *TERROR FORMING II* WAS ONLY EVER IDLE SCRIBBLING FROM A MAN UNDERGOING THERAPY IN A MENTAL HEALTH HOSPITAL.
IT WAS NOT ART.
ITS POPULARITY WAS WHOLLY DUE TO ***MARKETING.*** THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY. A TROUBLED AUTHOR, A SENSITIVE SOUL, BEATEN TO DEATH BY OTHER PATIENTS WHO DID NOT KNOW BETTER.
MY CURSE ISN'T THAT I DIED BEFORE SEEING MY GREATEST SUCCESS.
MY CURSE IS THAT MY GREATEST SUCCESS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH ME.
THE THREE PATIENTS IN ORANGE STRAIGHT JACKETS WHO BEAT ME TO DEATH WERE JUST AS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS BESTSELLER AS I WAS.
AND...NO...THAT'S NOT RIGHT...

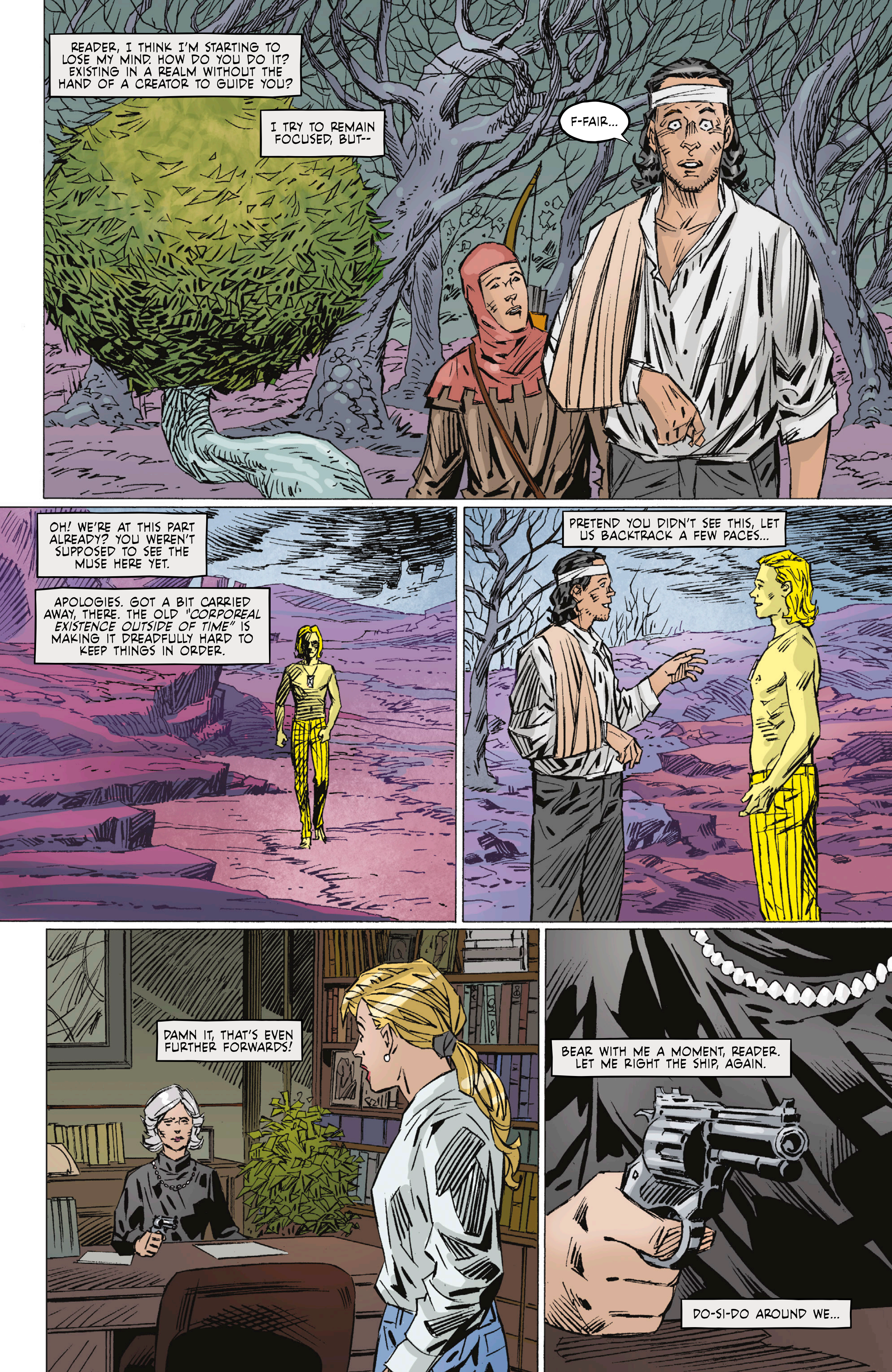
I'VE GOT SOMETHING WRONG. IT WASN'T A HOSPITAL. IT WAS A PRISON. THEY WEREN'T PATIENTS, THEY WERE INMATES. I WAS HEALING FROM THERAPY...YET...HELD IN A PRISON...
FORGIVE ME, READER. ATEMPORAL EXISTENCE IS MAKING LINEAR STORYTELLING SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT. OLD HABITS REEMERGE, HABITS NOT YET ENCOUNTERED CLOUD THE PRESENT, AGING EVERYTHING BEFORE ME.
I FEEL LIKE I'M WALKING IN A MEMORY I HAVEN'T HAD YET. I LOOK AROUND ME AND FEEL NOSTALGIA FOR THE BRAND NEW.
IF I THINK ABOUT IT TOO MUCH, THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF MY EXISTENCE WILL DRIVE ME MAD.
I WORRY WE MIGHT INVENT TIME TRAVEL WERE WE TO THINK TOO CLOSELY ON THIS.
IMAGINE THAT.



READER I--
MY DRAMATIC EXIT WAS SOMEWHAT HAMPERED BY THE ARMY OF FEARS BLOCKING THE NORTH, EAST, AND WEST.
I HAVE NEVER SEEN SO MANY. NOT SINCE THE PLAGUE.
TELL ME, MAESTRO...
HAS YOUR HERO FOUND AN ARMY OF STORYTELLERS IN THAT HEAD OF HIS?
FROM HIS HEAD, AND OTHER REALMS BESIDE. MANY HAVE ANSWERED THE CALL.
EVEN THOSE FROM THE DARK CELLS.
WELL, ALL SAVE THE MAN BEHIND THE BUTTERFLY DOOR. HE REFUSED.
HE DID NOT EVEN ANSWER WHEN WE KNOCKED.
IT SEEMS YOU AND HE ARE THE ONLY DISSENTERS.
AT LEAST ANOTHER RECOGNIZES THE INHERENT CONTRADICTION OF YOUR MISSION. TO STOP ENDLESS SEQUELS BY CALLING ON PAST INFLUENCES.
I DOUBT THAT.
OUR RED KING IS QUITE THE CLASSICIST.

I'VE A GREAT MIND TO GO AND WAKE HIM, AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS!
I WOULD ADVISE AGAINST THAT.
WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
A PLACE OF CONFESSIONS.
BUT I HAVE NOTHING TO CONFESS?
THEN LISTEN.
YOU SPOKE JUST NOW OF "PAST INFLUENCES".
BUT AS THE GREEKS TEACH US, INFLUENCE IS NOT LINEAR. IT CAN ALSO MOVE BACKWARDS IN TIME.
THE OXEN WALKING BACKWARDS IN THE SAND, THE BABE HERMES EDUCATING THE ADULT APOLLO.
THE REALM OF GODS IS OUT OF TIME, YET NOT OUT OF INFLUENCE.
THUS, THEIR REACH FLOWS BACK...
...AND FORTH ALIKE.

KNOWING THIS, I WISHED MY LEGACY TO LIVE FOREVER, FOR MY WORK TO BE TIMELESS. TO ACHIEVE THIS I PONDERED THE FUTURE AND PONDERED YOU. I IMAGINED ONE WHO WOULD TAKE THE SONNET TO GREAT HEIGHTS AND EMBRACE THE HUMANISM OF MY ANTIQUITY.
SO YOU SEE, BARD, THE INEVITABILITY OF YOUR ONE DAY EXISTING, INFLUENCED ME. FOR ALL ART IS MEMORY, AND MINE WAS OF A PERSON, A TIME NOT YET COME TO PASS. I LOOKED AROUND ME AND IMAGINED MY HOME, MY CITY, MY PEERS, AS YOU WOULD, HUNDREDS OF YEARS AFTER MY DEATH. I SAW YOUR GHOST LOOKING BACK AT ME AS I HAD LOOKED BACK AT THE GREEKS.
WE CAN SEE THE FUTURE, IF WE LOOK ABOUT US WITH OLD EYES.
SO, BARD, LOOK AROUND.
TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.
WILL?


READER, I THINK I'M STARTING TO LOSE MY MIND. HOW DO YOU DO IT? EXISTING IN A REALM WITHOUT THE HAND OF A CREATOR TO GUIDE YOU?
I TRY TO REMAIN FOCUSED, BUT--
F-FAIR...
OH! WE'RE AT THIS PART ALREADY? YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO SEE THE MUSE HERE YET.
APOLOGIES. GOT A BIT CARRIED AWAY, THERE. THE OLD "CORPOREAL EXISTENCE OUTSIDE OF TIME" IS MAKING IT DREADFULLY HARD TO KEEP THINGS IN ORDER.
PRETEND YOU DIDN'T SEE THIS, LET US BACKTRACK A FEW PACES...
DAMN IT, THAT'S EVEN FURTHER FORWARDS!
BEAR WITH ME A MOMENT, READER. LET ME RIGHT THE SHIP, AGAIN.
DO-SI-DO AROUND WE...

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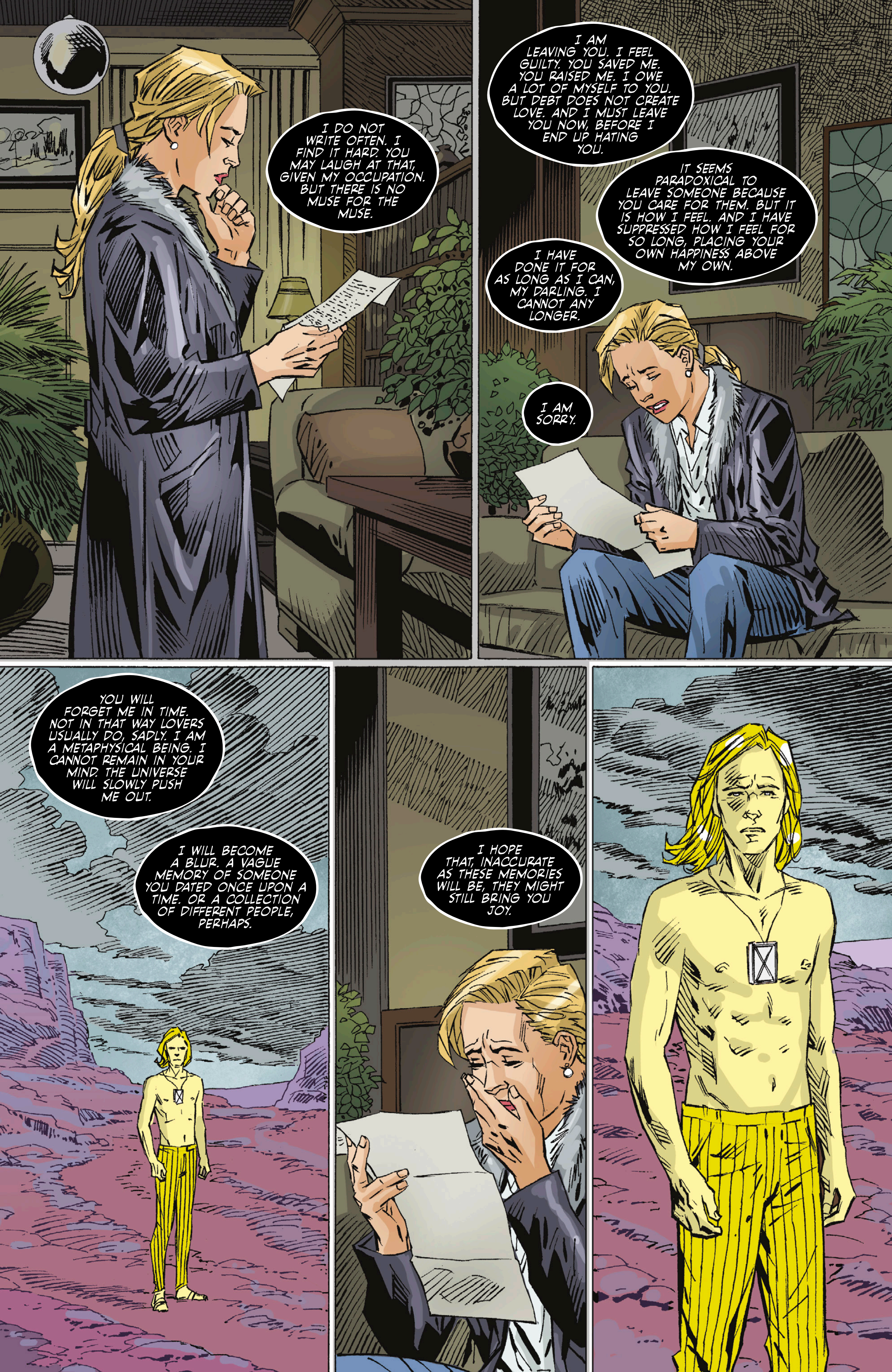
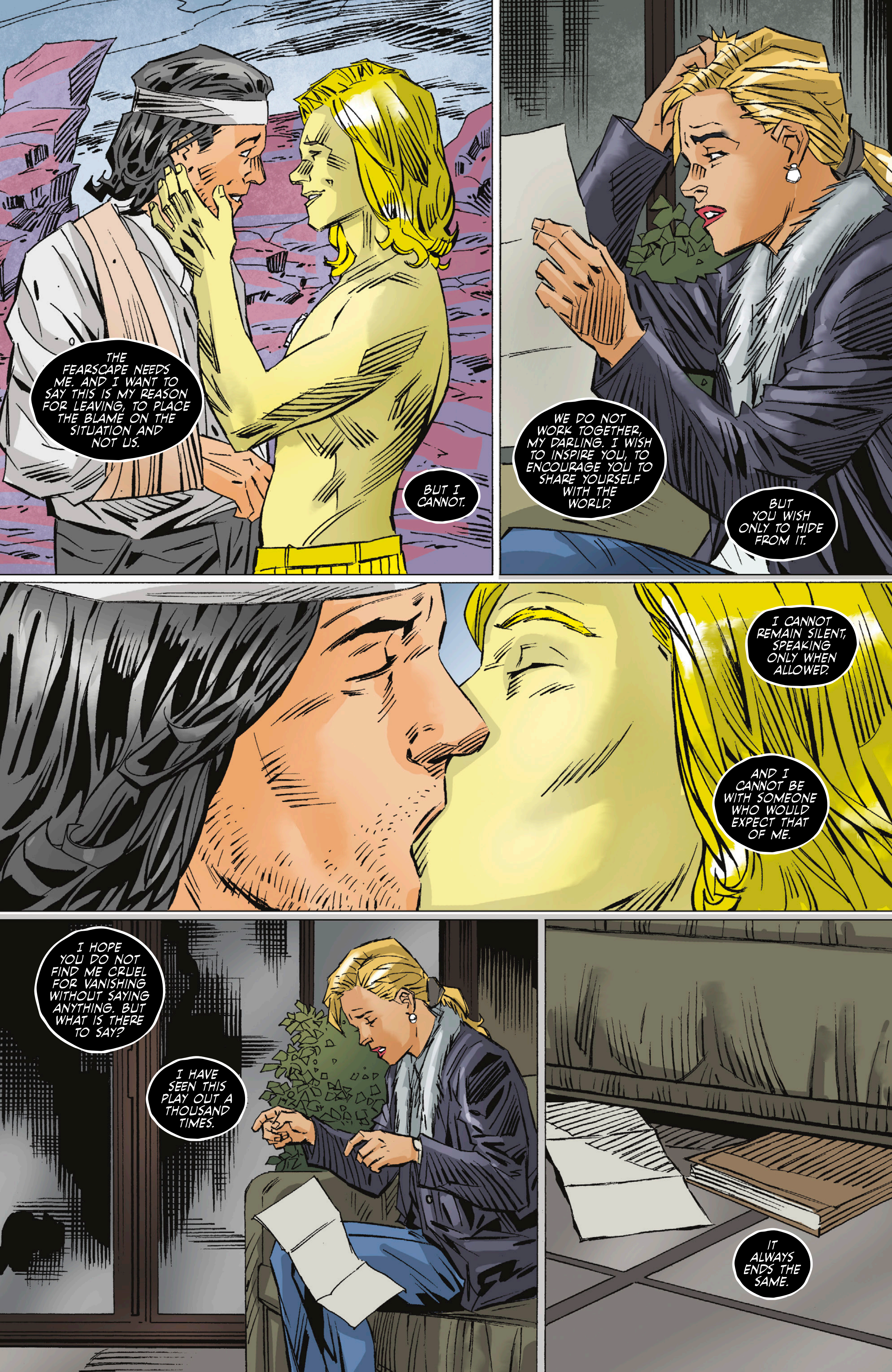
...GO!
AH YES. PERFECT. THIRD TIME'S A CHARM.
THE CURTAIN RISES.
DEAR JILL...
JILL

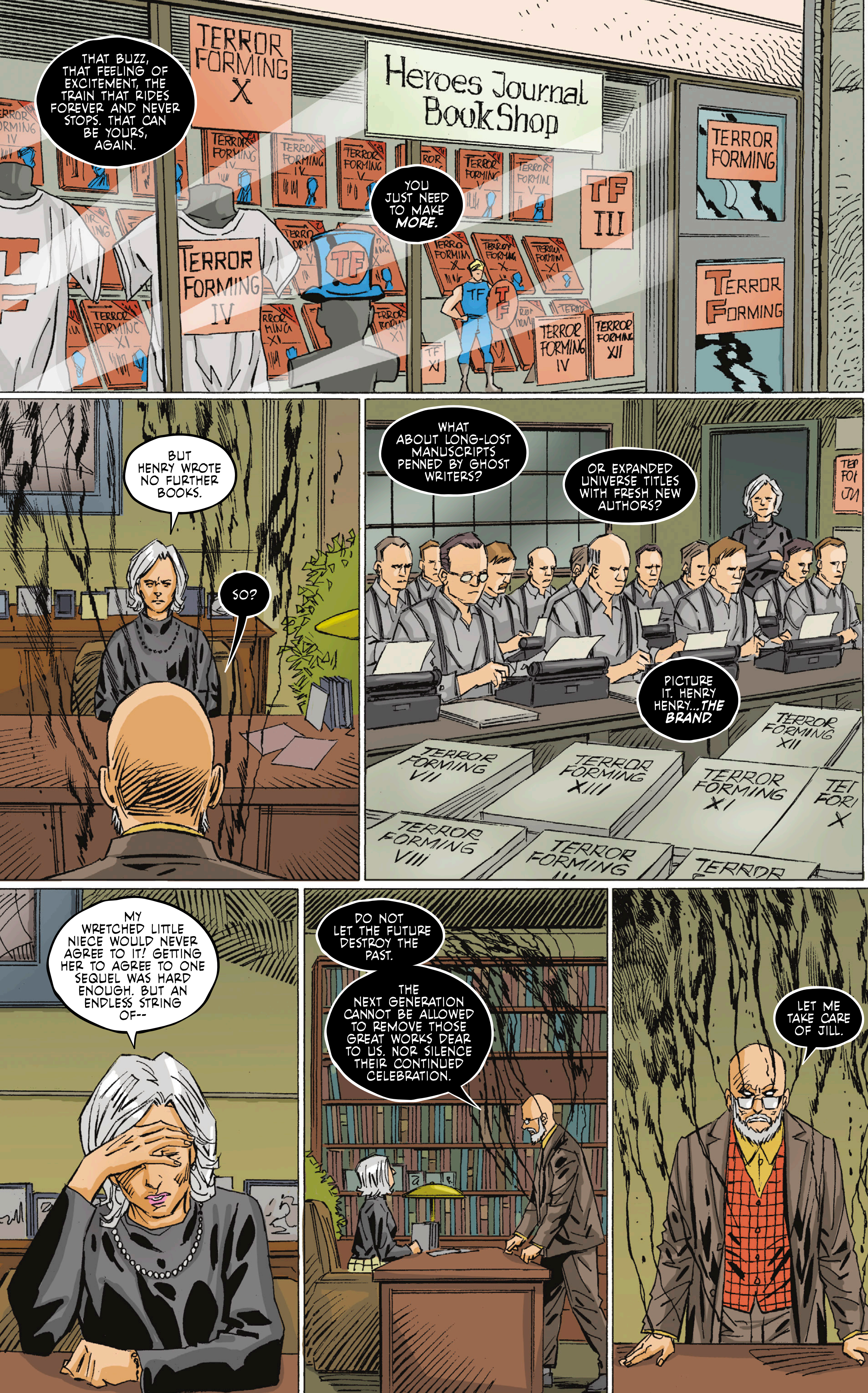

I DO NOT WRITE OFTEN. I FIND IT HARD. YOU MAY LAUGH AT THAT, GIVEN MY OCCUPATION. BUT THERE IS NO MUSE FOR THE MUSE.
I AM LEAVING YOU. I FEEL GUILTY. YOU SAVED ME. YOU RAISED ME. I OWE A LOT OF MYSELF TO YOU. BUT DEBT DOES NOT CREATE LOVE. AND I MUST LEAVE YOU NOW, BEFORE I END UP HATING YOU.
IT SEEMS PARADOXICAL TO LEAVE SOMEONE BECAUSE YOU CARE FOR THEM. BUT IT IS HOW I FEEL. AND I HAVE SUPPRESSED HOW I FEEL FOR SO LONG, PLACING YOUR OWN HAPPINESS ABOVE MY OWN.
I HAVE DONE IT FOR AS LONG AS I CAN, MY DARLING. I CANNOT ANY LONGER.
I AM SORRY.
YOU WILL FORGET ME IN TIME. NOT IN THAT WAY LOVERS USUALLY DO, SADLY. I AM A METAPHYSICAL BEING. I CANNOT REMAIN IN YOUR MIND. THE UNIVERSE WILL SLOWLY PUSH ME OUT.
I WILL BECOME A BLUR. A VAGUE MEMORY OF SOMEONE YOU DATED ONCE UPON A TIME. OR A COLLECTION OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE, PERHAPS.
I HOPE THAT, INACCURATE AS THESE MEMORIES WILL BE, THEY MIGHT STILL BRING YOU JOY.


THE FEARSCAPE NEEDS ME. AND I WANT TO SAY THIS IS MY REASON FOR LEAVING, TO PLACE THE BLAME ON THE SITUATION AND NOT US.
BUT I CANNOT.
WE DO NOT WORK TOGETHER, MY DARLING. I WISH TO INSPIRE YOU, TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO SHARE YOURSELF WITH THE WORLD.
BUT YOU WISH ONLY TO HIDE FROM IT.
I CANNOT REMAIN SILENT, SPEAKING ONLY WHEN ALLOWED.
AND I CANNOT BE WITH SOMEONE WHO WOULD EXPECT THAT OF ME.
I HOPE YOU DO NOT FIND ME CRUEL FOR VANISHING WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING. BUT WHAT IS THERE TO SAY?
I HAVE SEEN THIS PLAY OUT A THOUSAND TIMES.
IT ALWAYS ENDS THE SAME.

END CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER FOUR

READER, A CONFESSION. I HAVE COMPLETELY LOST TRACK OF THE PLOT. I'M AFRAID YOU SHALL HAVE TO PIECE IT TOGETHER YOURSELF. IT MAY REQUIRE SOME REREADING OR REIMAGINING OF PRIOR CHAPTERS. (BETTER YET, COMPLETELY DISREGARD WHAT CAME BEFORE! LET US START AFRESH, TOGETHER!)
HERMANN & HUM
IT IS STRANGE TO READ THE STORY IN THE SAME DETACHED WAY YOU DO. I SAID TO YOU ONCE *"I SHALL NOT EXIST IF YOU DO NOT IMAGINE ME"*, AND I DARESAY THAT HAS NEVER BEEN MORE TRUE. WITHOUT A PLACE IN THIS TALE TO TETHER MYSELF, I HAVE BECOME TRAPPED IN YOUR MIND, AT THE MERCY OF YOUR EYES ON THE PAGE.
IT IS AS IF I AM A READER ALONGSIDE YOU.
IMAGINE THAT.
I'M BORED.
I WON! TERROR FORMING II IS PUBLISHED.
AND YET...
AND YET YOU FEEL A DEEP EMPTINESS INSIDE.
THE EXCITEMENT OF THE CHASE. NOT KNOWING IF YOU'LL PULL IT OFF. THE DANGER. THE ***CONTROL.***
ALL OF THAT IS GONE.
YES! PRECISELY THAT! WHY DO I FEEL THIS WAY, DEMON? WHY DOES MY BLOOD FEEL COLD?
YOU MADE THE SAME MISTAKE EVERY ROOKIE DOES, WHEN CREATING THEIR FIRST SEQUEL...
TERROR FORMING II
TERROR FORMING II
YOU ONLY MADE ONE.


THAT BUZZ, THAT FEELING OF EXCITEMENT, THE TRAIN THAT RIDES FOREVER AND NEVER STOPS. THAT CAN BE YOURS, AGAIN.
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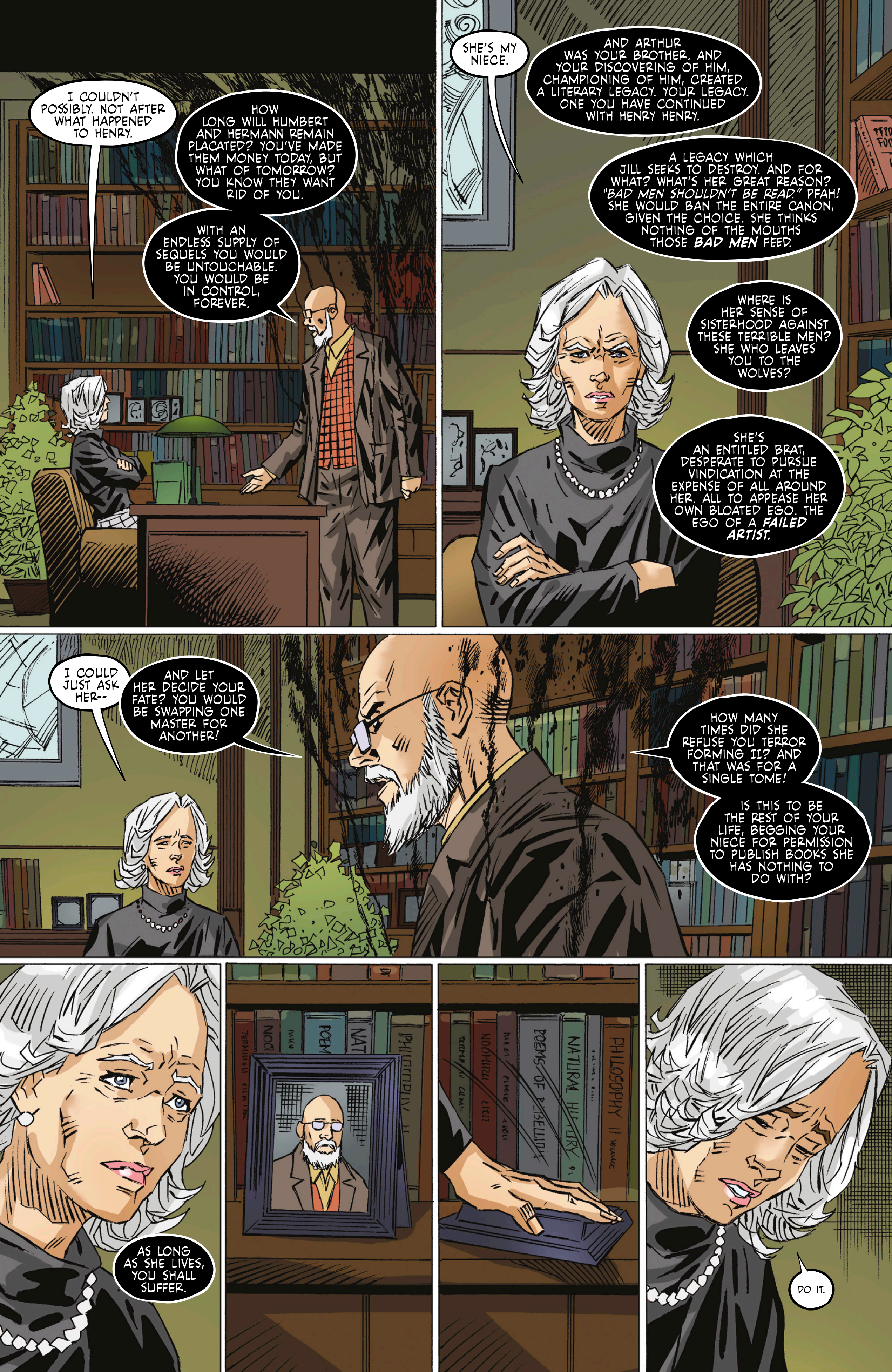
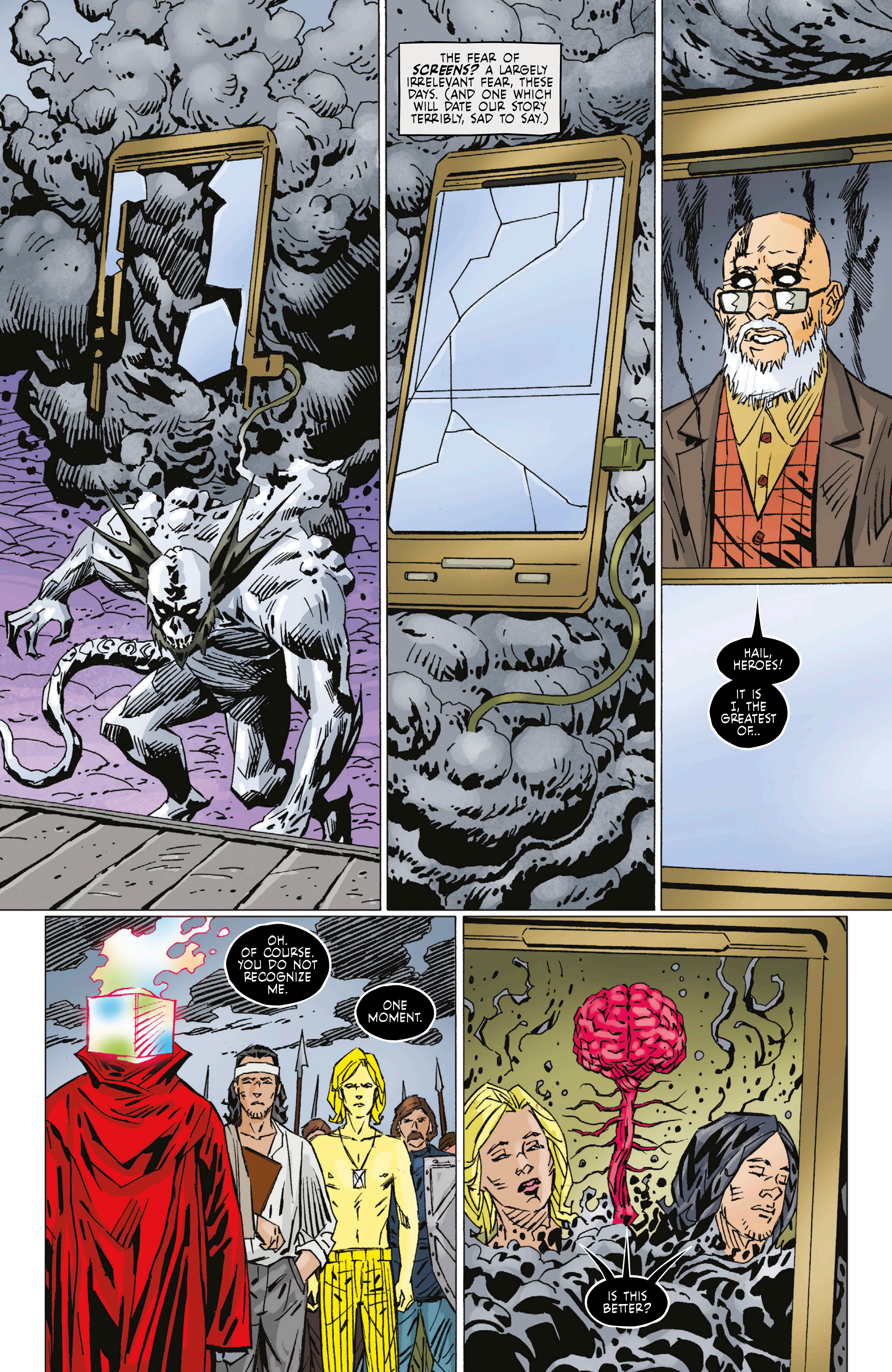
TERROR FORMING X
YOU JUST NEED TO MAKE MORE.
TERROR FORMING
TF III
TERROR FORMING IV
TERROR FORMING
TERROR FORMING XII
BUT HENRY WROTE NO FURTHER BOOKS.
SO?
WHAT ABOUT LONG-LOST MANUSCRIPTS PENNED BY GHOST WRITERS?
OR EXPANDED UNIVERSE TITLES WITH FRESH NEW AUTHORS?
PICTURE IT. HENRY HENRY... THE BRAND.
TERROR FORMING VII
TERROR FORMING XIII
TERROR FORMING XII
TERROR FORMING XI
TERROR FORMING VIII
MY WRETCHED LITTLE NIECE WOULD NEVER AGREE TO IT! GETTING HER TO AGREE TO ONE SEQUEL WAS HARD ENOUGH. BUT AN ENDLESS STRING OF--
DO NOT LET THE FUTURE DESTROY THE PAST.
THE NEXT GENERATION CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO REMOVE THOSE GREAT WORKS DEAR TO US. NOR SILENCE THEIR CONTINUED CELEBRATION.
LET ME TAKE CARE OF JILL.



I COULDN'T POSSIBLY. NOT AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO HENRY.
HOW LONG WILL HUMBERT AND HERMANN REMAIN PLACATED? YOU'VE MADE THEM MONEY TODAY, BUT WHAT OF TOMORROW? YOU KNOW THEY WANT RID OF YOU.
WITH AN ENDLESS SUPPLY OF SEQUELS YOU WOULD BE UNTOUCHABLE. YOU WOULD BE IN CONTROL, FOREVER.
SHE'S MY NIECE.
AND ARTHUR WAS YOUR BROTHER. AND YOUR DISCOVERING OF HIM, CHAMPIONING OF HIM, CREATED A LITERARY LEGACY. YOUR LEGACY. ONE YOU HAVE CONTINUED WITH HENRY HENRY.
A LEGACY WHICH JILL SEEKS TO DESTROY. AND FOR WHAT? WHAT'S HER GREAT REASON? *"BAD MEN SHOULDN'T BE READ."* PFAH! SHE WOULD BAN THE ENTIRE CANON, GIVEN THE CHOICE. SHE THINKS NOTHING OF THE MOUTHS THOSE ***BAD MEN*** FEED.
WHERE IS HER SENSE OF SISTERHOOD AGAINST THESE TERRIBLE MEN? SHE WHO LEAVES YOU TO THE WOLVES?
SHE'S AN ENTITLED BRAT, DESPERATE TO PURSUE VINDICATION AT THE EXPENSE OF ALL AROUND HER. ALL TO APPEASE HER OWN BLOATED EGO. THE EGO OF A ***FAILED ARTIST.***
I COULD JUST ASK HER--
AND LET HER DECIDE YOUR FATE? YOU WOULD BE SWAPPING ONE MASTER FOR ANOTHER!
HOW MANY TIMES DID SHE REFUSE YOU TERROR FORMING II? AND THAT WAS FOR A SINGLE TOME!
IS THIS TO BE THE REST OF YOUR LIFE, BEGGING YOUR NIECE FOR PERMISSION TO PUBLISH BOOKS SHE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH?
AS LONG AS SHE LIVES, YOU SHALL SUFFER.
POEMS OF REBELLION
NATURAL HISTORY
PHILOSOPHY II
DO IT.

A MORE HONEST DEPICTION OF ARTHUR PROCTOR I COULD NOT HAVE WRITTEN MYSELF! THAT CREATURE ON THE PAGES PRIOR MAY JUST BE WEARING HIS FACE, BUT DO NOT BE FOOLED, READER. PROCTOR PÈRE SINGS THROUGH THE MASK.
UPON REFLECTION, PERHAPS I SHOULD NOT HAVE CHASTISED MYSELF SO MUCH FOR MURDERING HIM. EVIDENTLY I PROLONGED JILL'S LIFE IN DOING SO.
(ADMITTEDLY I WAS ALSO TRYING TO KILL JILL AT THE TIME. BUT I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A BIG BELIEVER THAT ACTIONS MATTER MORE THAN INTENT. THE BEST INTENTIONS OF THE WORLD WILL GET YOU NOWHERE WITHOUT THE WILL TO FULFIL THEM!)
RIGHT, ANYWAY, BACK TO THE TENTS AND SWORDS AND HORSES AND OTHER ASSORTED FANTASY PARAPHERNALIA...
WE SPOKE OF IT OFTEN, YOU RECALL?
OF COURSE! BUT I DID NOT BELIEVE YOU HAD WRITTEN IT.
BESIDES, WE'RE TRYING TO PUT AN END TO ALL THESE SEQUELS.
SURELY THIS WOULD JUST MAKE THINGS WORSE?
Hamlet II
THAT'S THE POINT! THIS WOULD BE A SEQUEL TO END ALL SEQUELS. TERRIBLE BEYOND MEASURE. IT WOULD DESTROY ALL THAT CAME BEFORE IT, END MY LEGACY, AND LIBERATE MANKIND FROM THE CROSS HAIRS OF THE WESTERN CANON!
WHAT IF PEOPLE *LIKE* IT? WHAT IF IT BACKFIRES?
THE CANON? WE CAN BUT HOPE.

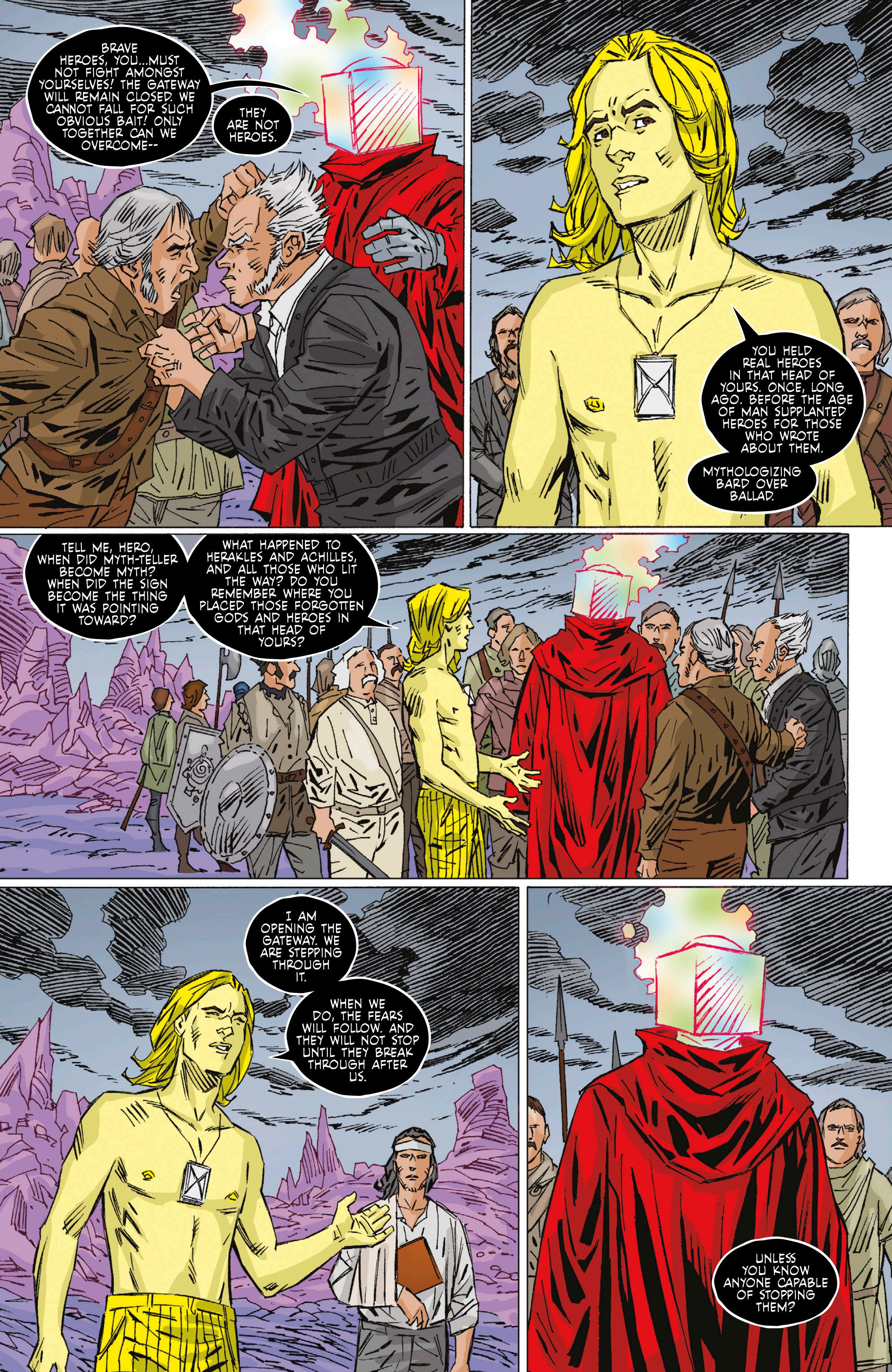
IT'S BEEN POINTING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION LONG ENOUGH.
HEAR ME, WRITERS! TO ME, STORYTELLERS!
IT HAS LONG BEEN MY HONOR TO CARRY YOU IN MY HEAD ALL THESE YEARS! YOU ARE THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST MINDS HUMANITY EVER PRODUCED.
WHICH IS WHY HERE, IN THIS REALM OF IMAGINATION, I MUST CALL ON YOUR MINDS ONCE MORE!
THE FEARS SEEK TO PUSH THROUGH THE GATEWAY INTO THE WORLD OF MAN.
YOUR FORMER HOME.
WE CANNOT ALLOW--
FEAR INCOMING!
IS THAT...?

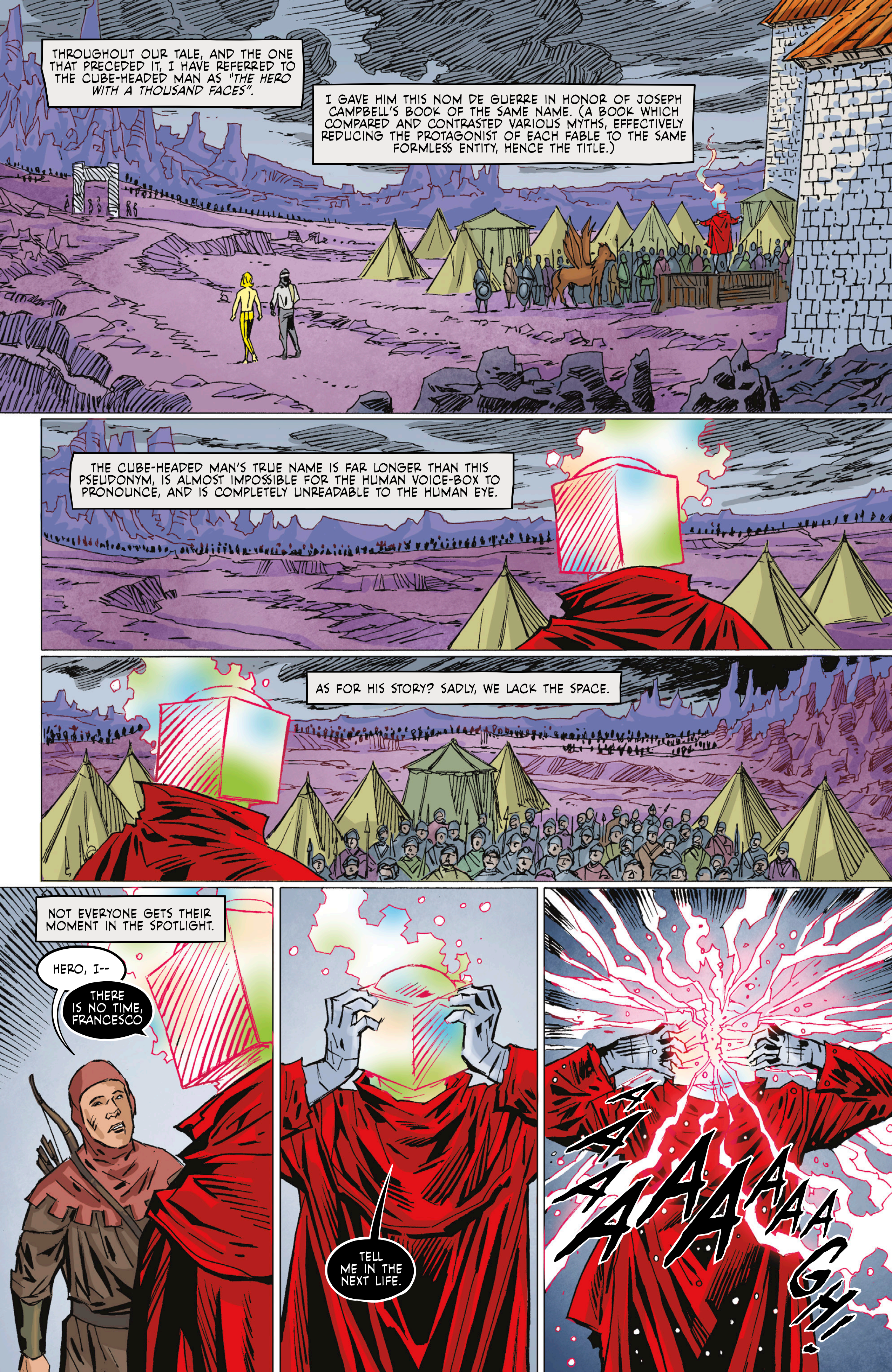

THE FEAR OF SCREENS? A LARGELY IRRELEVANT FEAR, THESE DAYS. (AND ONE WHICH WILL DATE OUR STORY TERRIBLY, SAD TO SAY.)
HAIL, HEROES!
IT IS I, THE GREATEST OF...
OH. OF COURSE. YOU DO NOT RECOGNIZE ME.
ONE MOMENT.
IS THIS BETTER?

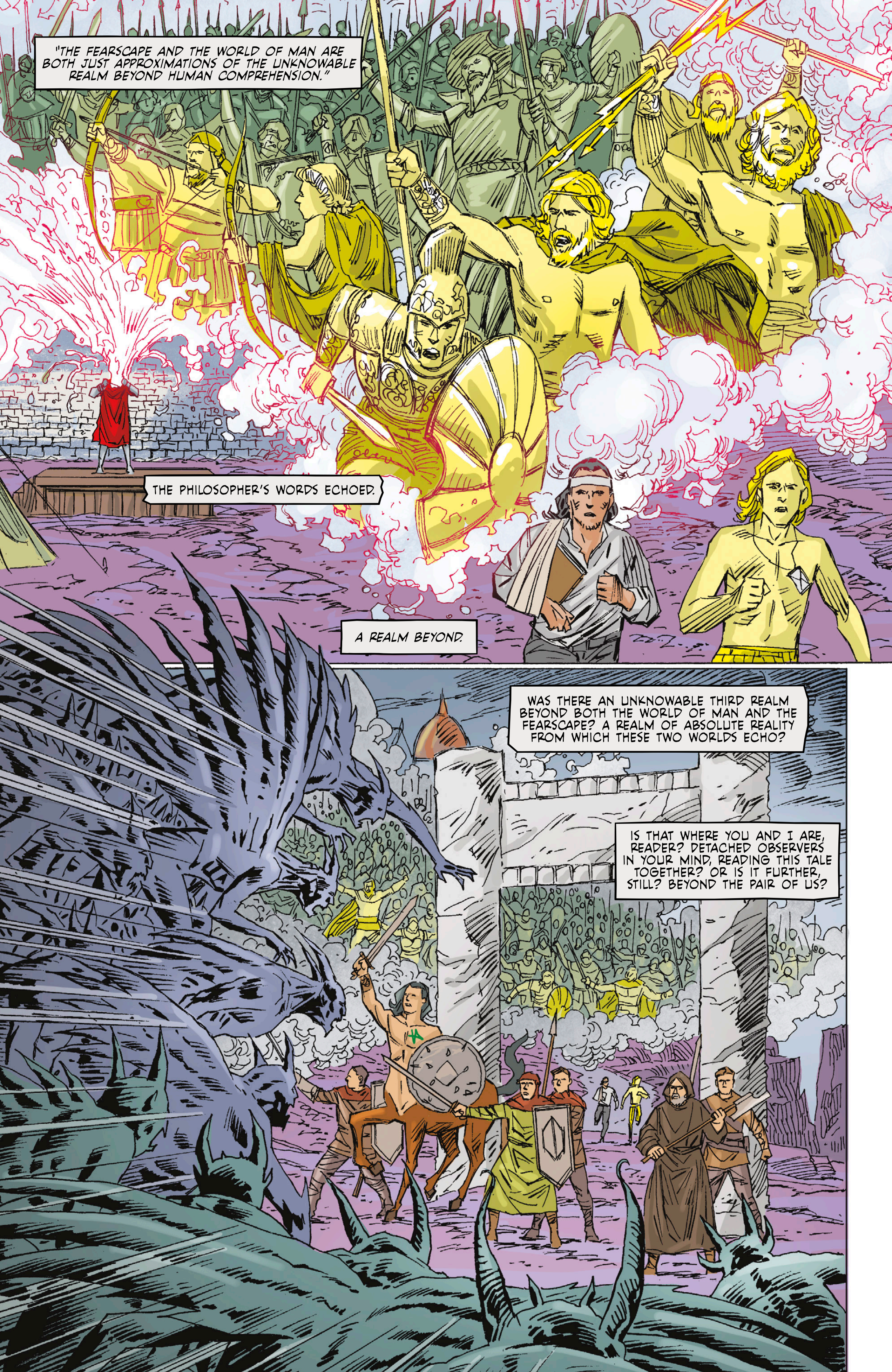
HMMM. NO. THAT FORM DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT ANYMORE.
I'VE COME TO PREFER THIS ONE. IT FITS ME SO MUCH BETTER.
HOW DOES THE SAYING GO? "WE BECOME WHAT WE PRETEND TO BE".
OR, AS YOUR BARD SO EVIDENTLY STILL BELIEVES...
"APPAREL OFT PROCLAIMS THE MAN."
Heroes Journal Book Shop
STILL, BOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING. I DID NOT CALL TO PARLEY.
THIS BACK-WARDS LITTLE REALM IS NOW READY FOR MY BRETHREN.
YOU WOULD BE WISE TO LET THEM THROUGH.
AND IF YOU NEED ADDED MOTIVATION? CONSIDER THIS.
I AM ON MY WAY TO MURDER JILL PROCTOR.
SURELY ONE OF YOU BRAVE HEROES NEEDS TO OPEN THE GATEWAY SO YOU CAN COME SAVE HER?

OPEN THE GATEWAY! THE DIVISION SERVES NO PURPOSE! THE FEARSCAPE AND THE WORLD OF MAN ARE ALREADY JUST TWO APPROXIMATIONS OF THE TRUE UNKNOWABLE NATURE OF REALITY! THE DIVIDE IS AN ILLUSION!
KEEP IT CLOSED! THERE ARE ELEMENTS OF THE FEARSCAPE UNKNOWABLE AND THUS UNTRANSLATABLE TO THE WORLD OF MAN. WE CANNOT ALLOW THEM TO MERGE! IT WILL LEAD TO THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR WORLD, OR THEIRS, OR BOTH!
YOUR PRESUPPOSITION OF THE PRESENCE OF THESE UNKNOWABLES FORBIDS THEIR LACK OF EXISTENCE. IN ASSUMING THE PRESENCE OF UNKNOWABLE QUALITIES, YOU ASSUME THEIR EXISTENCE, AND PRESUME TO KNOW THE NATURE OF THE UNKNOWABLE!
DON'T BE A FOOL! I EMBRACE MY LACK OF KNOWING BY ACCEPTING THERE MAY BE ELEMENTS IN THIS REALM UNKNOWABLE TO MAN. IT IS YOU WHO PRESUPPOSES KNOWLEDGE BY FORBIDDING THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE EXISTENCE OF UNKNOWABLES.
[INDECIPHERABLE GERMAN RANTING]
[INDECIPHERABLE GERMAN RANTING]
AH YES, *PHILOSOPHERS.*
I FIND MYSELF SUDDENLY ROOTING FOR THE FEARS.
BARD, IS YOUR PLAN CERTAIN TO WORK?
I CAN OPEN THE GATEWAY, BUT I CANNOT CLOSE IT AFTERWARDS. THE FEARS WILL HAVE A PATH STRAIGHT THROUGH.
BARD?
ONE MOMENT, DEAR...

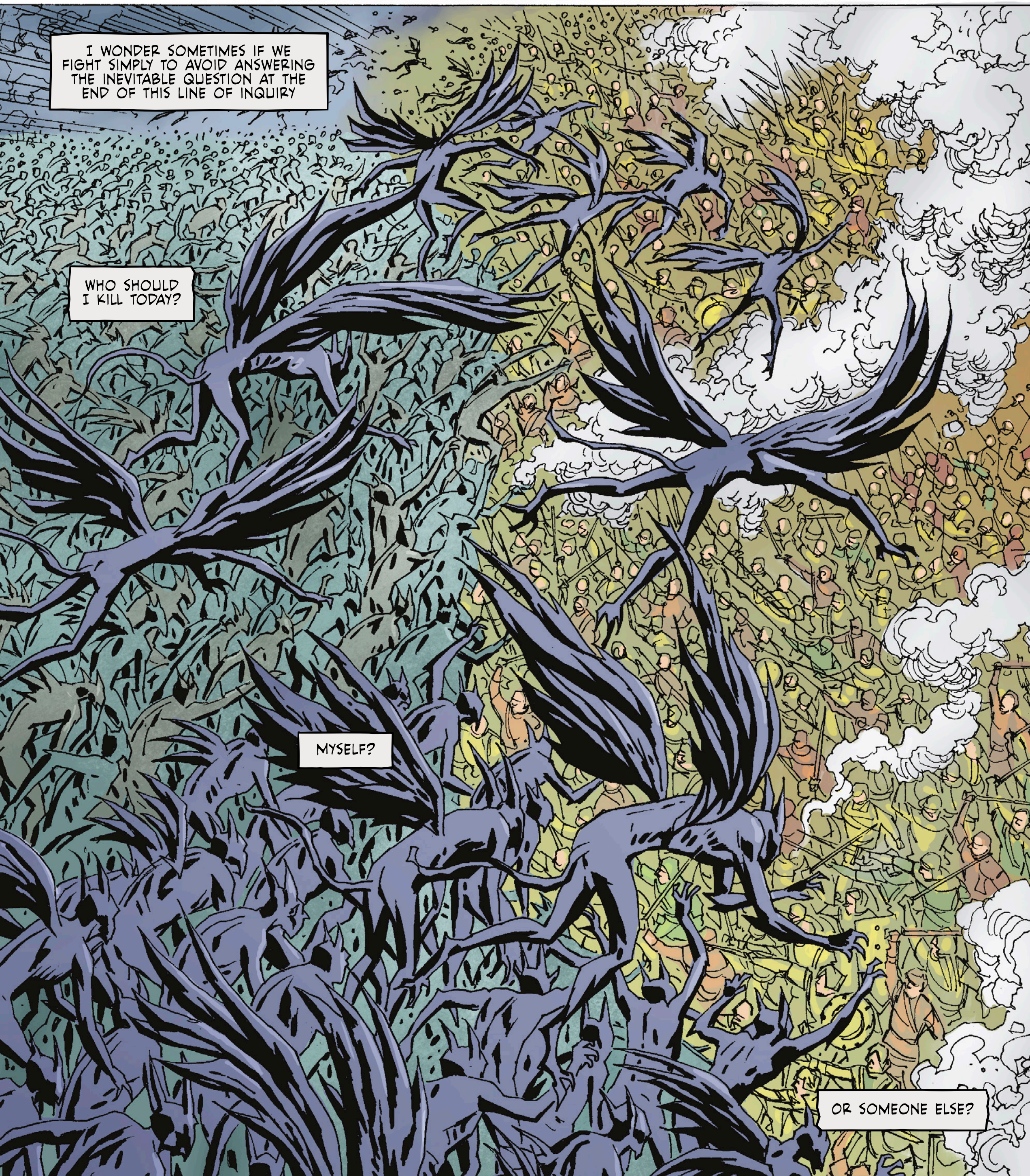
PETRARCH! I HAVE NEED OF YOU!
YOU MUST TRAVEL TO MY LIBRARY. AND, ONCE THERE, BURN IT TO THE GROUND.
THERE ARE THINGS THERE, CREATURES, THAT BIND MY LEGACY TO THIS PLACE. THEY MUST BE DESTROYED, THAT THE FEARSCAPE MAY BE RID OF MY INFLUENCE.
BUT YOUR WORK...
I HAVE ALL THE WORK I NEED RIGHT HERE.
ENOUGH TO FREE THE WORLD.
Hamlet II
BARD, PLEASE, THINK OF YOUR LEGACY--
WE MORTALS HAVE NO LEGACY, MAESTRO.
WE SIMPLY ECHO THE GODS.
FOLLOWING THEIR FOOTSTEPS, WHICHEVER WAY THEY POINT IN THE SAND.


BRAVE HEROES, YOU...MUST NOT FIGHT AMONGST YOURSELVES! THE GATEWAY WILL REMAIN CLOSED. WE CANNOT FALL FOR SUCH OBVIOUS BAIT! ONLY TOGETHER CAN WE OVERCOME--
THEY ARE NOT HEROES.
YOU HELD REAL HEROES IN THAT HEAD OF YOURS. ONCE, LONG AGO. BEFORE THE AGE OF MAN SUPPLANTED HEROES FOR THOSE WHO WROTE ABOUT THEM.
MYTHOLOGIZING BARD OVER BALLAD.
TELL ME, HERO, WHEN DID MYTH-TELLER BECOME MYTH? WHEN DID THE SIGN BECOME THE THING IT WAS POINTING TOWARD?
WHAT HAPPENED TO HERAKLES AND ACHILLES, AND ALL THOSE WHO LIT THE WAY? DO YOU REMEMBER WHERE YOU PLACED THOSE FORGOTTEN GODS AND HEROES IN THAT HEAD OF YOURS?
I AM OPENING THE GATEWAY. WE ARE STEPPING THROUGH IT.
WHEN WE DO, THE FEARS WILL FOLLOW. AND THEY WILL NOT STOP UNTIL THEY BREAK THROUGH AFTER US.
UNLESS YOU KNOW ANYONE CAPABLE OF STOPPING THEM?


THROUGHOUT OUR TALE, AND THE ONE THAT PRECEDED IT, I HAVE REFERRED TO THE CUBE-HEADED MAN AS *"THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES"*.
I GAVE HIM THIS NOM DE GUERRE IN HONOR OF JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S BOOK OF THE SAME NAME. (A BOOK WHICH COMPARED AND CONTRASTED VARIOUS MYTHS, EFFECTIVELY REDUCING THE PROTAGONIST OF EACH FABLE TO THE SAME FORMLESS ENTITY, HENCE THE TITLE.)
THE CUBE-HEADED MAN'S TRUE NAME IS FAR LONGER THAN THIS PSEUDONYM, IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE HUMAN VOICE-BOX TO PRONOUNCE, AND IS COMPLETELY UNREADABLE TO THE HUMAN EYE.
AS FOR HIS STORY? SADLY, WE LACK THE SPACE.
NOT EVERYONE GETS THEIR MOMENT IN THE SPOTLIGHT.
HERO, I--
THERE IS NO TIME, FRANCESCO
TELL ME IN THE NEXT LIFE.
AAAAAAAAAAGH!

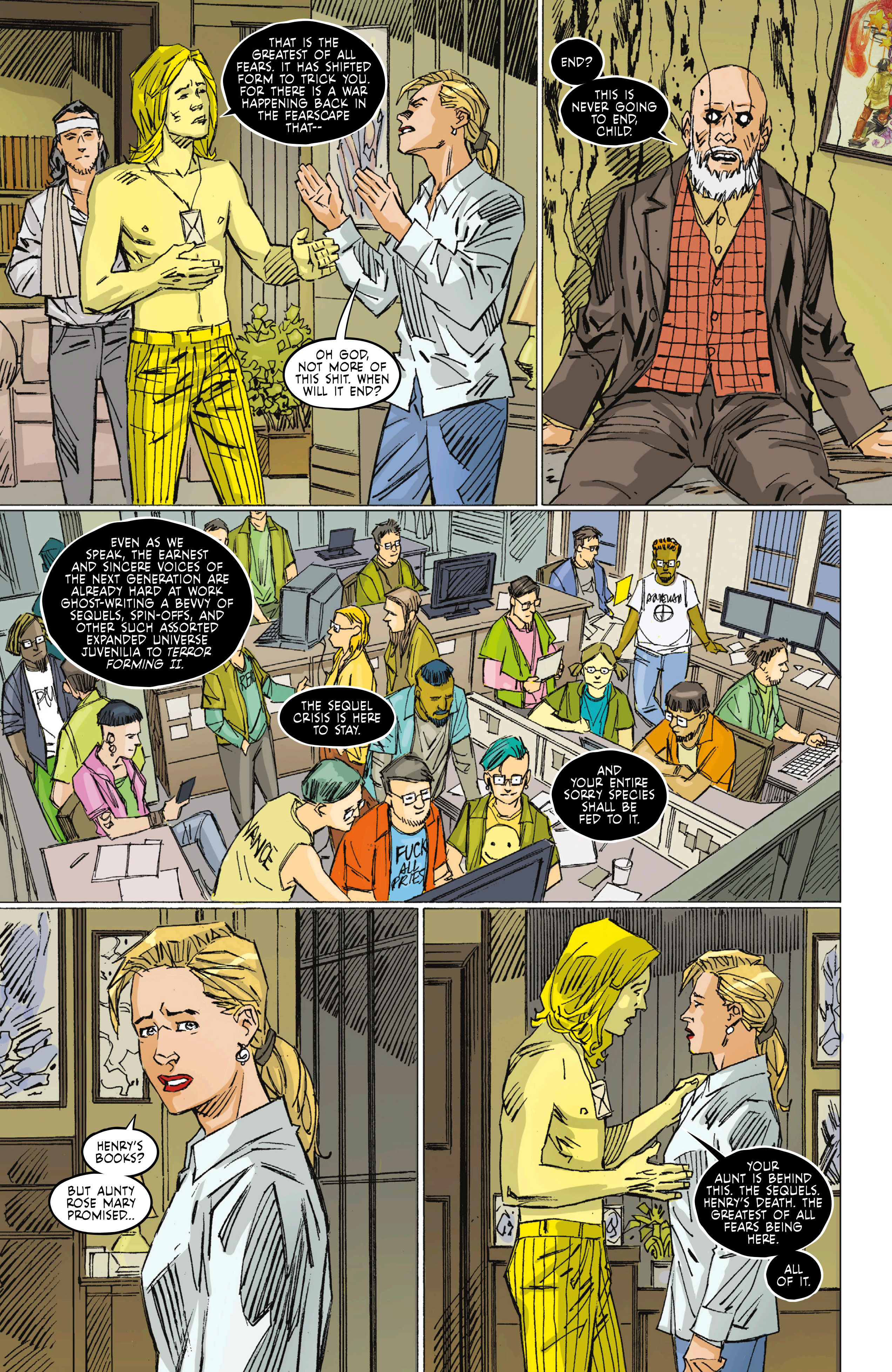

"THE FEARSCAPE AND THE WORLD OF MAN ARE BOTH JUST APPROXIMATIONS OF THE UNKNOWABLE REALM BEYOND HUMAN COMPREHENSION."
THE PHILOSOPHER'S WORDS ECHOED.
A REALM BEYOND.
WAS THERE AN UNKNOWABLE THIRD REALM BEYOND BOTH THE WORLD OF MAN AND THE FEARSCAPE? A REALM OF ABSOLUTE REALITY FROM WHICH THESE TWO WORLDS ECHO?
IS THAT WHERE YOU AND I ARE, READER? DETACHED OBSERVERS IN YOUR MIND, READING THIS TALE TOGETHER? OR IS IT FURTHER, STILL? BEYOND THE PAIR OF US?

IS THE PRESENCE OF SUCH A PLACE HOPEFUL? DOES IT DULL THE PAIN OF EXISTENCE TO KNOW THAT THE TRUTH OF REALITY IS BEYOND OUR REACH?
OR DOES SUCH KNOWLEDGE HURT US EVEN MORE? TO KNOW OUR SUFFERING, OUR SACRIFICES, OUR VICTORIES AND DEFEATS -- ALL ARE BUILT UPON A FAKE INTERPRETATION OF REALITY?
DO WE NEED THE WORLD AROUND US TO BE REAL FOR OUR SUFFERING TO MEAN SOMETHING? IS THE ALTERNATIVE, THAT WE SUFFER FOR NO PURPOSE, NO REASON, TOO MUCH TO BEAR?

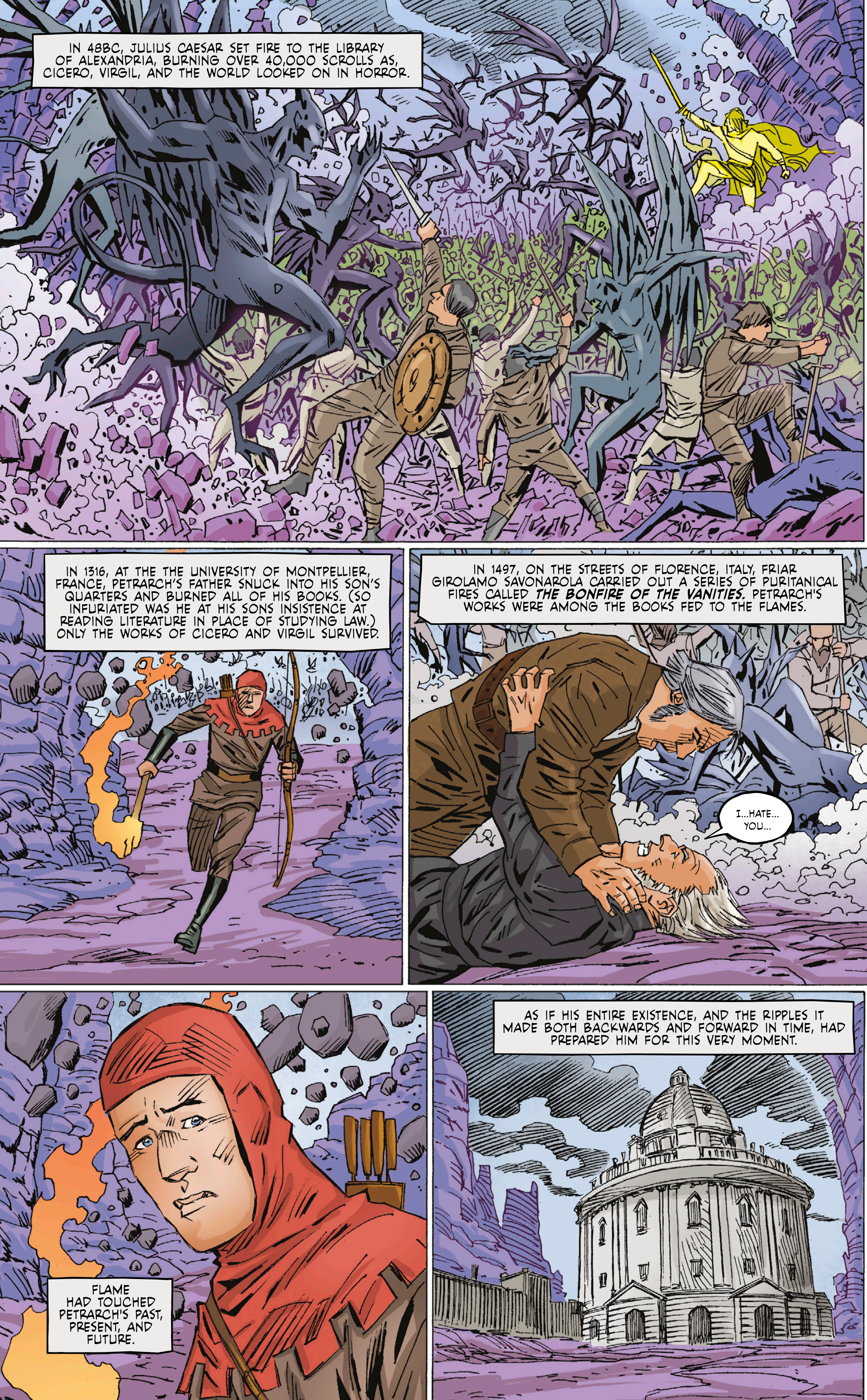

I WONDER SOMETIMES IF WE FIGHT SIMPLY TO AVOID ANSWERING THE INEVITABLE QUESTION AT THE END OF THIS LINE OF INQUIRY
WHO SHOULD I KILL TODAY?
MYSELF?
OR SOMEONE ELSE?

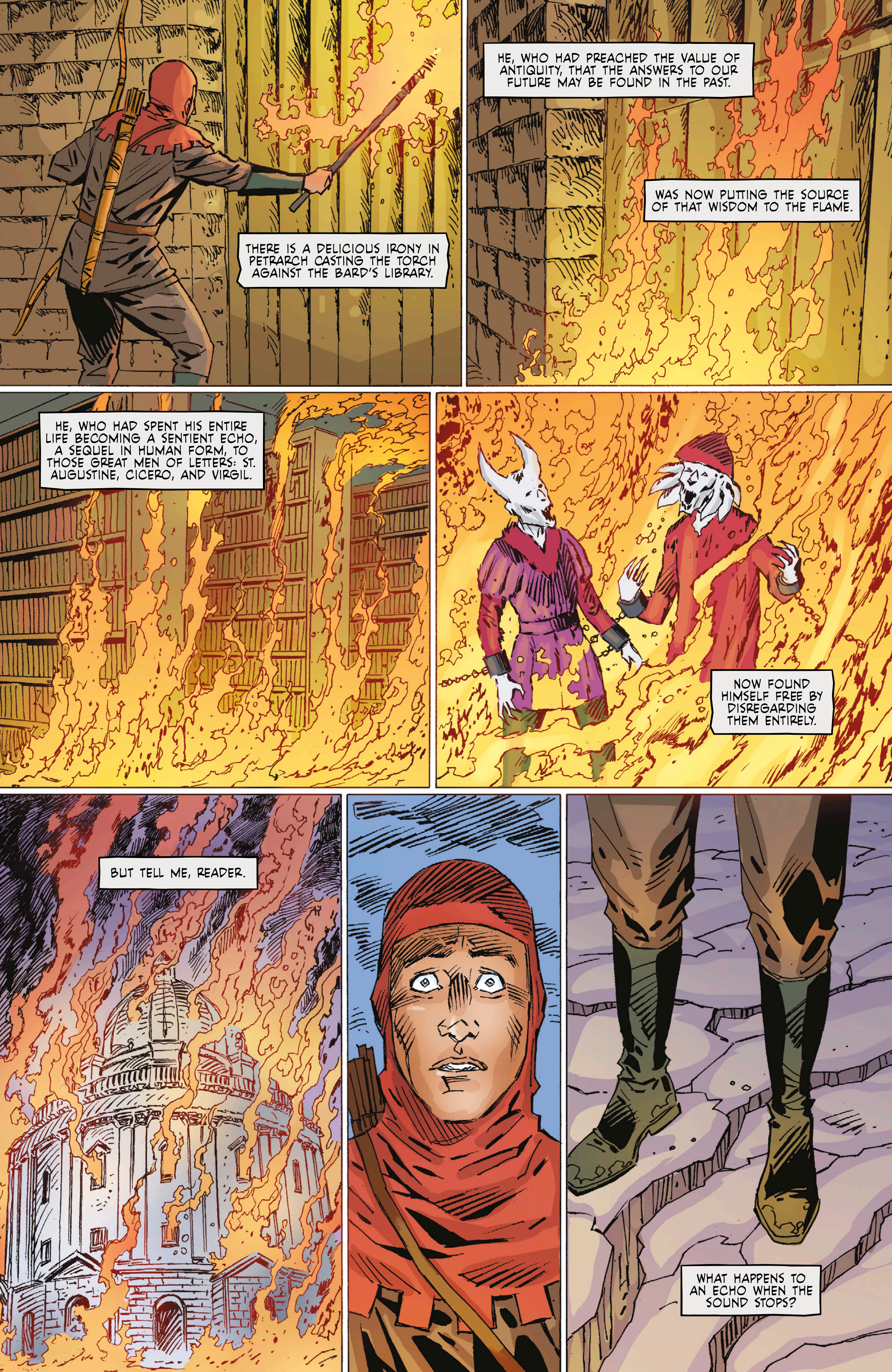
LET US RETREAT A MOMENT. LET US CATCH OUR BREATH BEFORE WE SPIRAL INTO INEVITABLE TRAGEDY.
LET US...LET US...
READER, WHY DOES THIS FEEL SO FAMILIAR? HAVE WE JUMPED BACK AGAIN?
WAIT! I'LL BE RIGHT THERE!
SORRY. I HAD MUSIC ON. I COULDN'T--
JILL! IS THAT YOU, M'GIRL?
D-DAD?!
HOW THE DEVIL ARE YOU?
NO...

YOU LITTLE BEAST...
HUH...?
YOU HAVE CROSSED THE LINE, OLD ONE.
D-DAD, ARE YOU--?!
JILL, MY DARLING, THAT IS NOT YOUR FATHER.

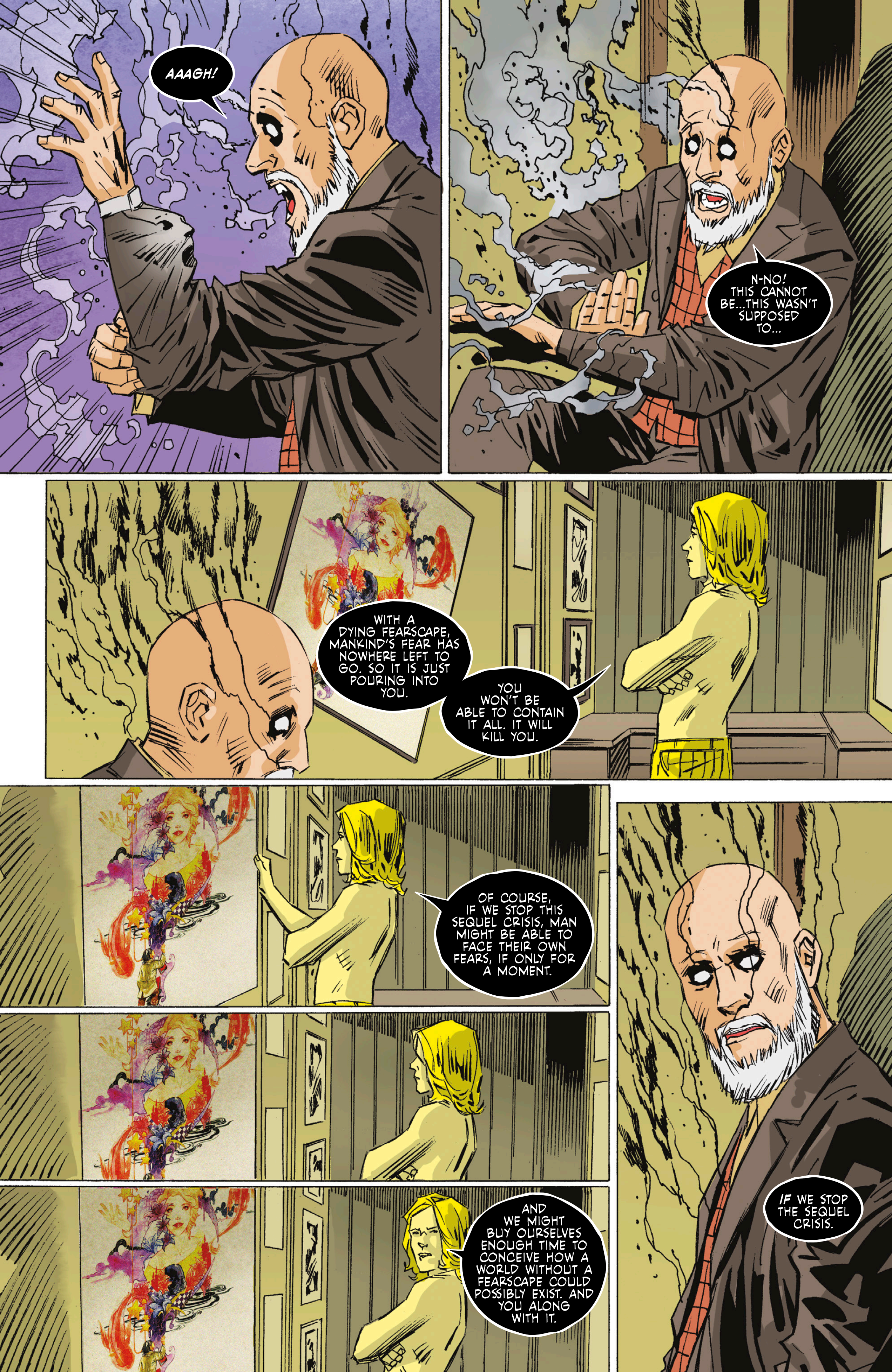

THAT IS THE GREATEST OF ALL FEARS. IT HAS SHIFTED FORM TO TRICK YOU. FOR THERE IS A WAR HAPPENING BACK IN THE FEARSCAPE THAT--
OH GOD, NOT MORE OF THIS SHIT. WHEN WILL IT END?
END?
THIS IS NEVER GOING TO END, CHILD.
EVEN AS WE SPEAK, THE EARNEST AND SINCERE VOICES OF THE NEXT GENERATION ARE ALREADY HARD AT WORK GHOST-WRITING A BEVVY OF SEQUELS, SPIN-OFFS, AND OTHER SUCH ASSORTED EXPANDED UNIVERSE JUVENILIA TO *TERROR FORMING II.*
THE SEQUEL CRISIS IS HERE TO STAY.
AND YOUR ENTIRE SORRY SPECIES SHALL BE FED TO IT.
HENRY'S BOOKS?
BUT AUNTY ROSE MARY PROMISED...
YOUR AUNT IS BEHIND THIS. THE SEQUELS. HENRY'S DEATH. THE GREATEST OF ALL FEARS BEING HERE.
ALL OF IT.

NO! I'M GOING TO TALK TO HER. THIS IS ALL NONSENSE.
AND EVEN IF IT ISN'T...I CAN STOP IT! SHE NEEDS MY PERMISSION!
FOOLISH GIRL. THE WHEELS ARE IN MOTION. THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO.
YOU CANNOT UNPUBLISH A BOOK.
YOU CANNOT REWRITE THE PAST.
I HAVE ONCE. I SHALL AGAIN.
TAKE ME TO THESE CONNOISSEURS OF TERRIBLE SEQUELS.
I HAVE A GIFT FOR THEM.
WHO ARE YOU?
A MAN OF EXTREME WILL. OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR MY FATHER.
AH. YOU'RE ONE OF *THOSE.*

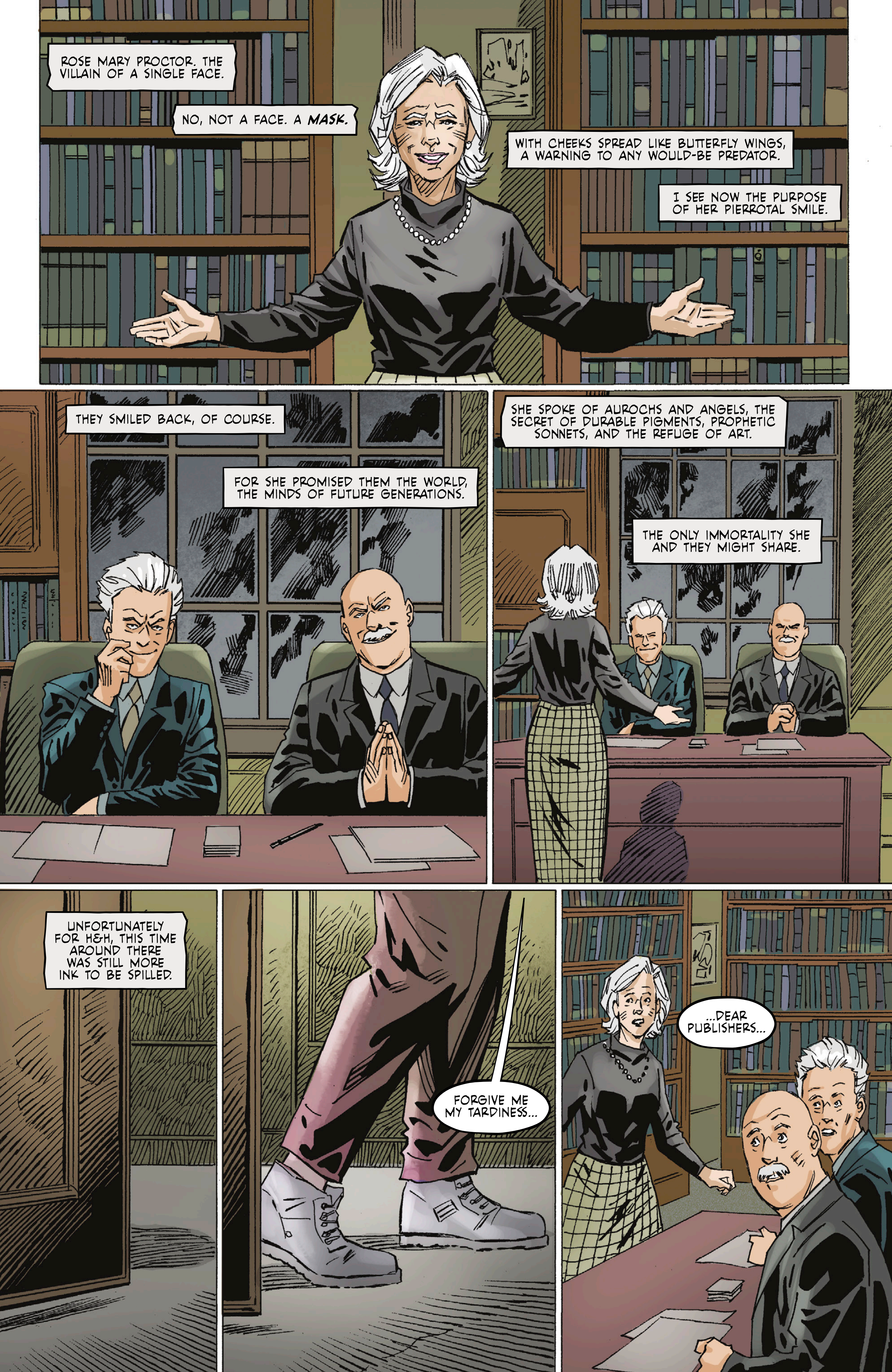

IN 48BC, JULIUS CAESAR SET FIRE TO THE LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA, BURNING OVER 40,000 SCROLLS AS, CICERO, VIRGIL, AND THE WORLD LOOKED ON IN HORROR.
IN 1316, AT THE THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTPELLIER, FRANCE, PETRARCH'S FATHER SNUCK INTO HIS SON'S QUARTERS AND BURNED ALL OF HIS BOOKS. (SO INFURIATED WAS HE AT HIS SONS INSISTENCE AT READING LITERATURE IN PLACE OF STUDYING LAW.) ONLY THE WORKS OF CICERO AND VIRGIL SURVIVED.
IN 1497, ON THE STREETS OF FLORENCE, ITALY, FRIAR GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA CARRIED OUT A SERIES OF PURITANICAL FIRES CALLED ***THE BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES.*** PETRARCH'S WORKS WERE AMONG THE BOOKS FED TO THE FLAMES.
I...HATE... YOU...
FLAME HAD TOUCHED PETRARCH'S PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.
AS IF HIS ENTIRE EXISTENCE, AND THE RIPPLES IT MADE BOTH BACKWARDS AND FORWARD IN TIME, HAD PREPARED HIM FOR THIS VERY MOMENT.


THERE IS A DELICIOUS IRONY IN PETRARCH CASTING THE TORCH AGAINST THE BARD'S LIBRARY.
HE, WHO HAD PREACHED THE VALUE OF ANTIQUITY, THAT THE ANSWERS TO OUR FUTURE MAY BE FOUND IN THE PAST.
WAS NOW PUTTING THE SOURCE OF THAT WISDOM TO THE FLAME.
HE, WHO HAD SPENT HIS ENTIRE LIFE BECOMING A SENTIENT ECHO, A SEQUEL IN HUMAN FORM, TO THOSE GREAT MEN OF LETTERS: ST. AUGUSTINE, CICERO, AND VIRGIL.
NOW FOUND HIMSELF FREE BY DISREGARDING THEM ENTIRELY.
BUT TELL ME, READER.
WHAT HAPPENS TO AN ECHO WHEN THE SOUND STOPS?

OH, FANTASTIC, BACK TO THIS LOT.
HOPEFULLY I CAN EUTHANIZE EULOGIZE THEM, TOO.
(DARE I SAY I'M BECOMING A BIT OF A DAB HAND AT THESE EMOTIONAL FAREWELLS? POSITIVELY CHEKHOVIAN!)
UGH!
THE FEARSCAPE! WHY CAN I SEE IT...HERE?!
IT'S CALLING OUT TO US. IT'S DYING.
IT WAS ONLY EVER BUILT FOR A SINGLE STORYTELLER. THE HERO MUST HAVE RELEASED THOUSANDS.
A SUICIDE PACT.
THE HERO, THE STORYTELLERS, THE MYTHS. ALL OF THEM WILL BE GONE. AND YOUR BRETHREN ALONG WITH THEM.
WE WILL BE THE ONLY ONES LEFT.
TELL ME, DARK ONE...
WHAT HAPPENS TO THE "GREATEST" FEAR, WHEN THERE ARE NO OTHERS?


AAAGH!
N-NO! THIS CANNOT BE...THIS WASN'T SUPPOSED TO...
WITH A DYING FEARSCAPE, MANKIND'S FEAR HAS NOWHERE LEFT TO GO. SO IT IS JUST POURING INTO YOU.
YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO CONTAIN IT ALL. IT WILL KILL YOU.
OF COURSE, IF WE STOP THIS SEQUEL CRISIS, MAN MIGHT BE ABLE TO FACE THEIR OWN FEARS, IF ONLY FOR A MOMENT.
AND WE MIGHT BUY OURSELVES ENOUGH TIME TO CONCEIVE HOW A WORLD WITHOUT A FEARSCAPE COULD POSSIBLY EXIST. AND YOU ALONG WITH IT.
IF WE STOP THE SEQUEL CRISIS.

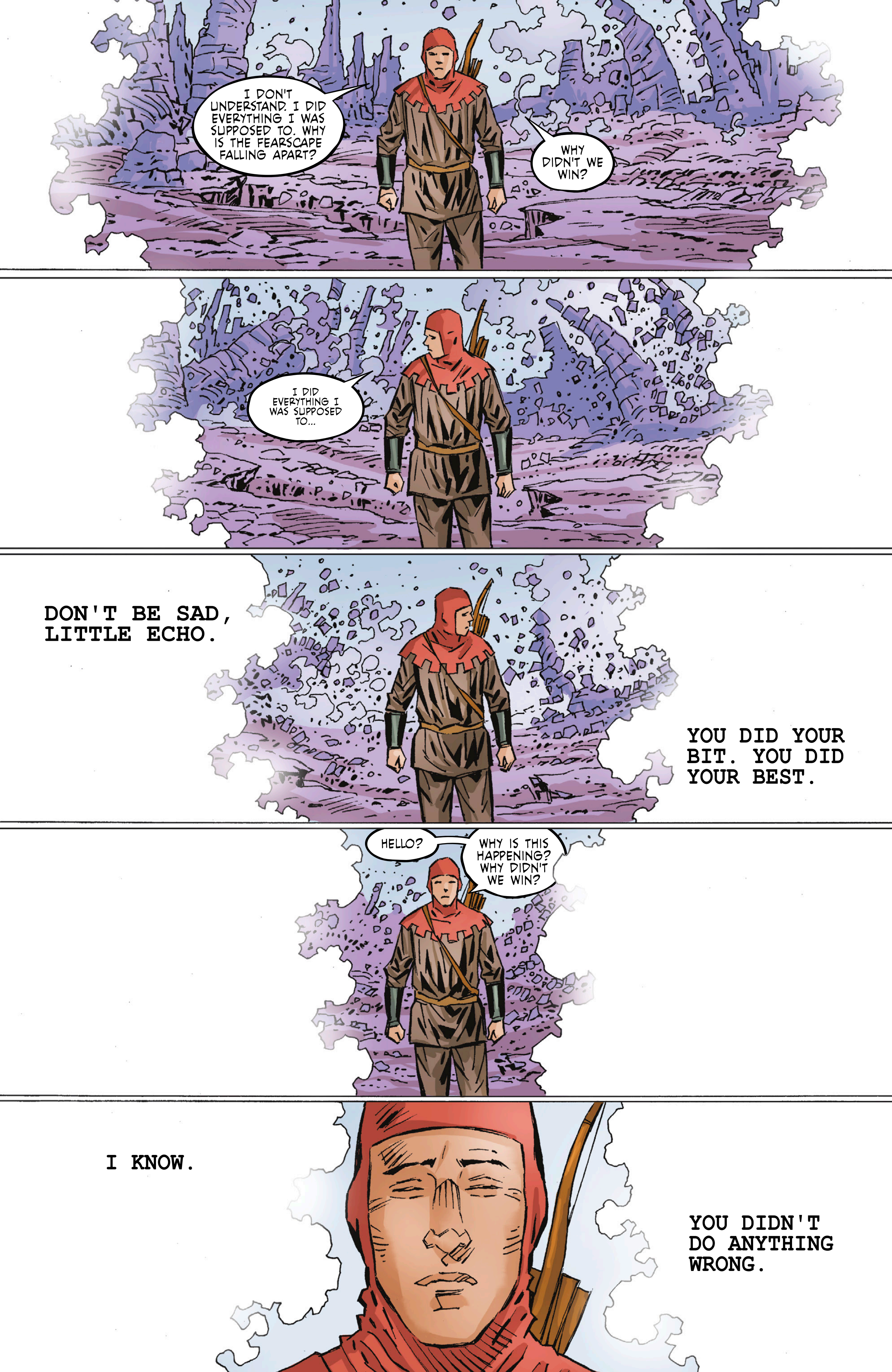
HERMANN&HUMBERT
SO IT'S A SEQUEL TO HAMLET?
YES.
HOW WILL THEY KNOW YOU WROTE IT? WHAT IF THEY THINK IT'S JUST FANFIC WRITTEN BY SOME RANDOM FAN?
I IMAGINE THAT WOULD MAKE THEM WANT TO PUBLISH IT EVEN MORE.
YEP. THAT'S FAR ENOUGH.
WHO'RE YOU?
DOESN'T MATTER. TURN AROUND.
YOU CAN'T DO THIS!
AND YET I AM.
YOU CAN STAY IN ROSE MARY'S OFFICE UNTIL SHE'S DONE.
HERMANN&HUMBERT
YOUR AUNT'S NOT TO BE DISTURBED.


ROSE MARY PROCTOR. THE VILLAIN OF A SINGLE FACE.
NO, NOT A FACE. A *MASK.*
WITH CHEEKS SPREAD LIKE BUTTERFLY WINGS, A WARNING TO ANY WOULD-BE PREDATOR.
I SEE NOW THE PURPOSE OF HER PIERROTAL SMILE.
THEY SMILED BACK, OF COURSE.
FOR SHE PROMISED THEM THE WORLD, THE MINDS OF FUTURE GENERATIONS.
SHE SPOKE OF AUROCHS AND ANGELS, THE SECRET OF DURABLE PIGMENTS, PROPHETIC SONNETS, AND THE REFUGE OF ART.
THE ONLY IMMORTALITY SHE AND THEY MIGHT SHARE.
UNFORTUNATELY FOR H&H, THIS TIME AROUND THERE WAS STILL MORE INK TO BE SPILLED.
FORGIVE ME MY TARDINESS...
...DEAR PUBLISHERS...

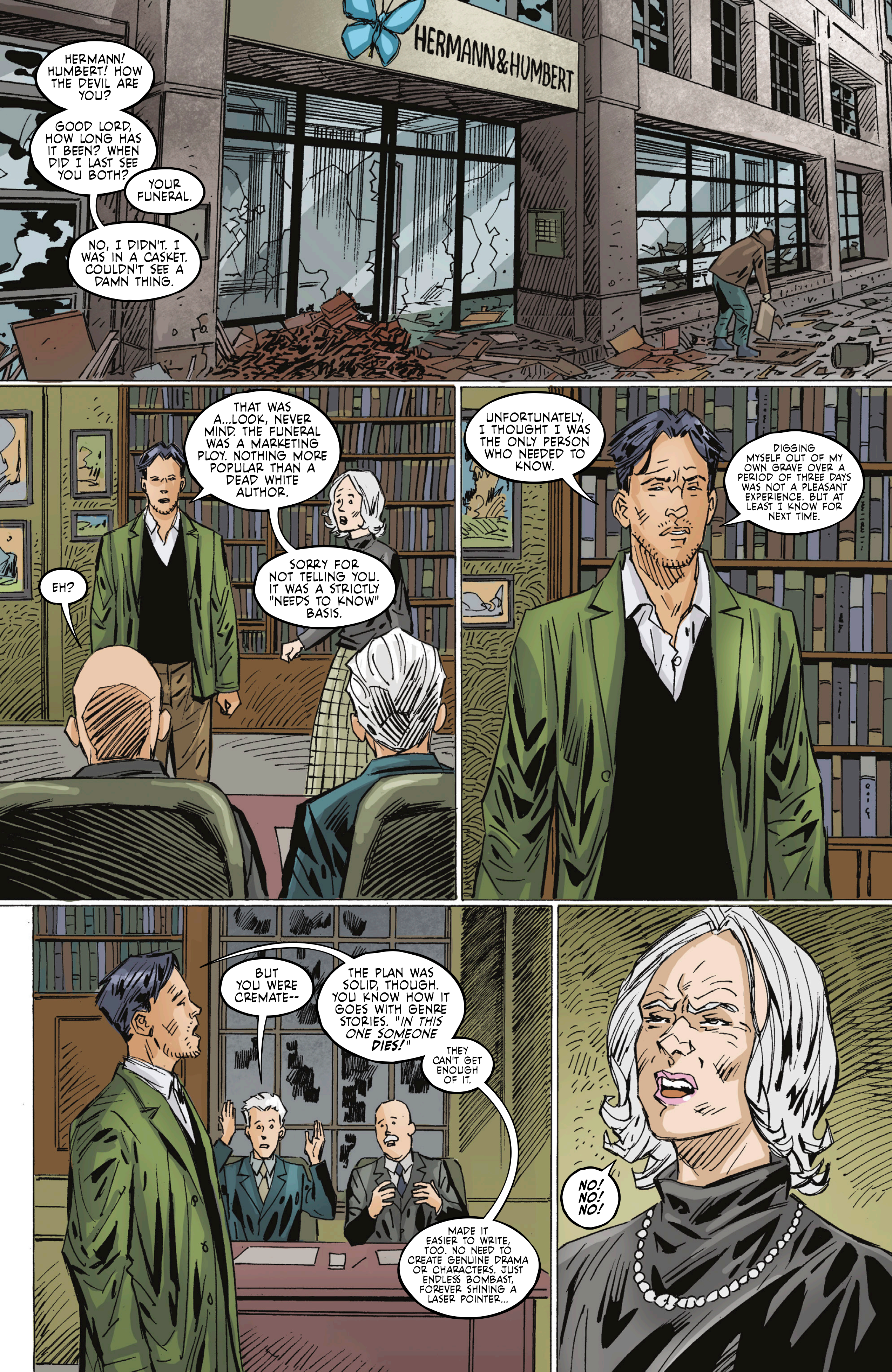
...I WAS SLEEPING.

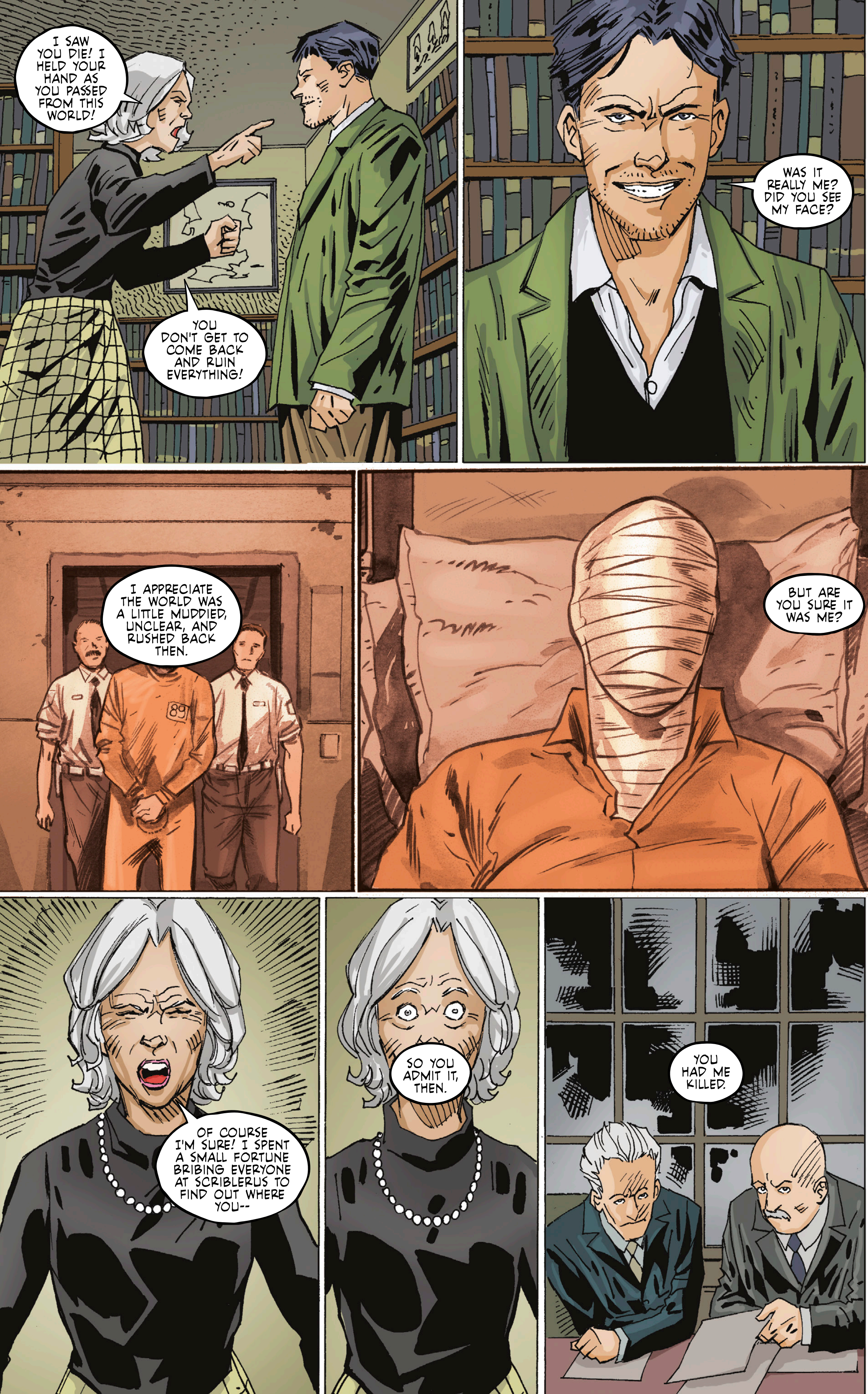
END CHAPTER FOUR

CHAPTER FIVE

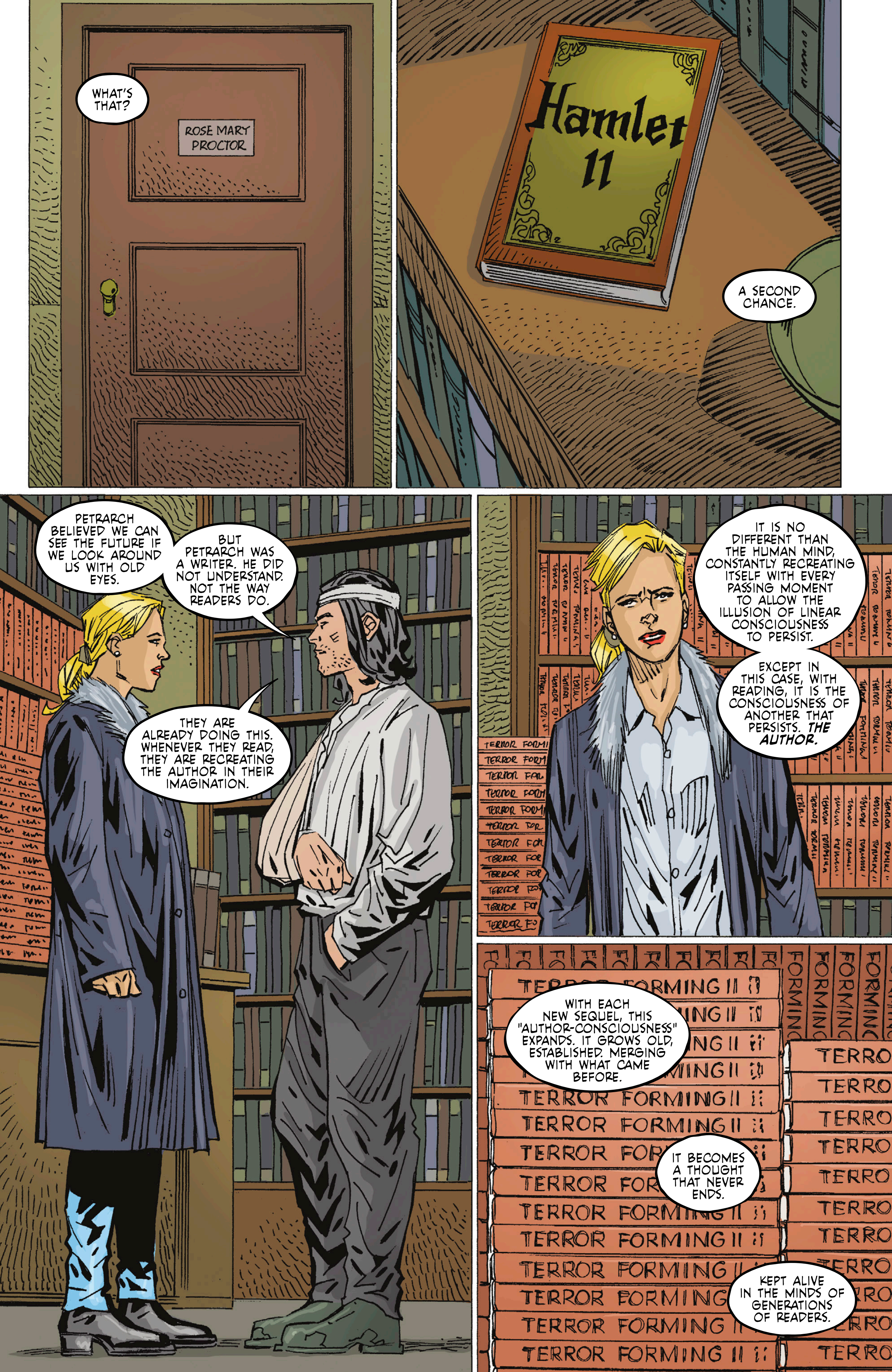

I DON'T UNDERSTAND. I DID EVERYTHING I WAS SUPPOSED TO. WHY IS THE FEARSCAPE FALLING APART?
WHY DIDN'T WE WIN?
I DID EVERYTHING I WAS SUPPOSED TO...
DON'T BE SAD, LITTLE ECHO.
YOU DID YOUR BIT. YOU DID YOUR BEST.
HELLO?
WHY IS THIS HAPPENING? WHY DIDN'T WE WIN?
I KNOW.
YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG.

YOU CAN DO EVERYTHING RIGHT AND STILL LOSE.
THAT'S JUST THE WAY THINGS ARE SOMETIMES. AND THAT'S OKAY.
COME ON, REST NOW.
LET OTHERS TAKE CARE OF THINGS. IT'S THEIR TURN NOW.
YOU GET SOME SLEEP.
I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN.
NOBODY EVER DOES.
SLEEP EASY, MAESTRO.
YOU HAVE EARNED IT.


HERMANN&HUMBERT
HERMANN! HUMBERT! HOW THE DEVIL ARE YOU?
GOOD LORD, HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN? WHEN DID I LAST SEE YOU BOTH?
YOUR FUNERAL.
NO, I DIDN'T. I WAS IN A CASKET. COULDN'T SEE A DAMN THING.
THAT WAS A...LOOK, NEVER MIND. THE FUNERAL WAS A MARKETING PLOY. NOTHING MORE POPULAR THAN A DEAD WHITE AUTHOR.
EH?
SORRY FOR NOT TELLING YOU. IT WAS A STRICTLY "NEEDS TO KNOW" BASIS.
UNFORTUNATELY, I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONLY PERSON WHO NEEDED TO KNOW.
DIGGING MYSELF OUT OF MY OWN GRAVE OVER A PERIOD OF THREE DAYS WAS NOT A PLEASANT EXPERIENCE. BUT AT LEAST I KNOW FOR NEXT TIME.
BUT YOU WERE CREMATE--
THE PLAN WAS SOLID, THOUGH. YOU KNOW HOW IT GOES WITH GENRE STORIES. "IN THIS ONE SOMEONE DIES!"
THEY CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF IT.
MADE IT EASIER TO WRITE, TOO. NO NEED TO CREATE GENUINE DRAMA OR CHARACTERS. JUST ENDLESS BOMBAST, FOREVER SHINING A LASER POINTER...
NO! NO! NO!

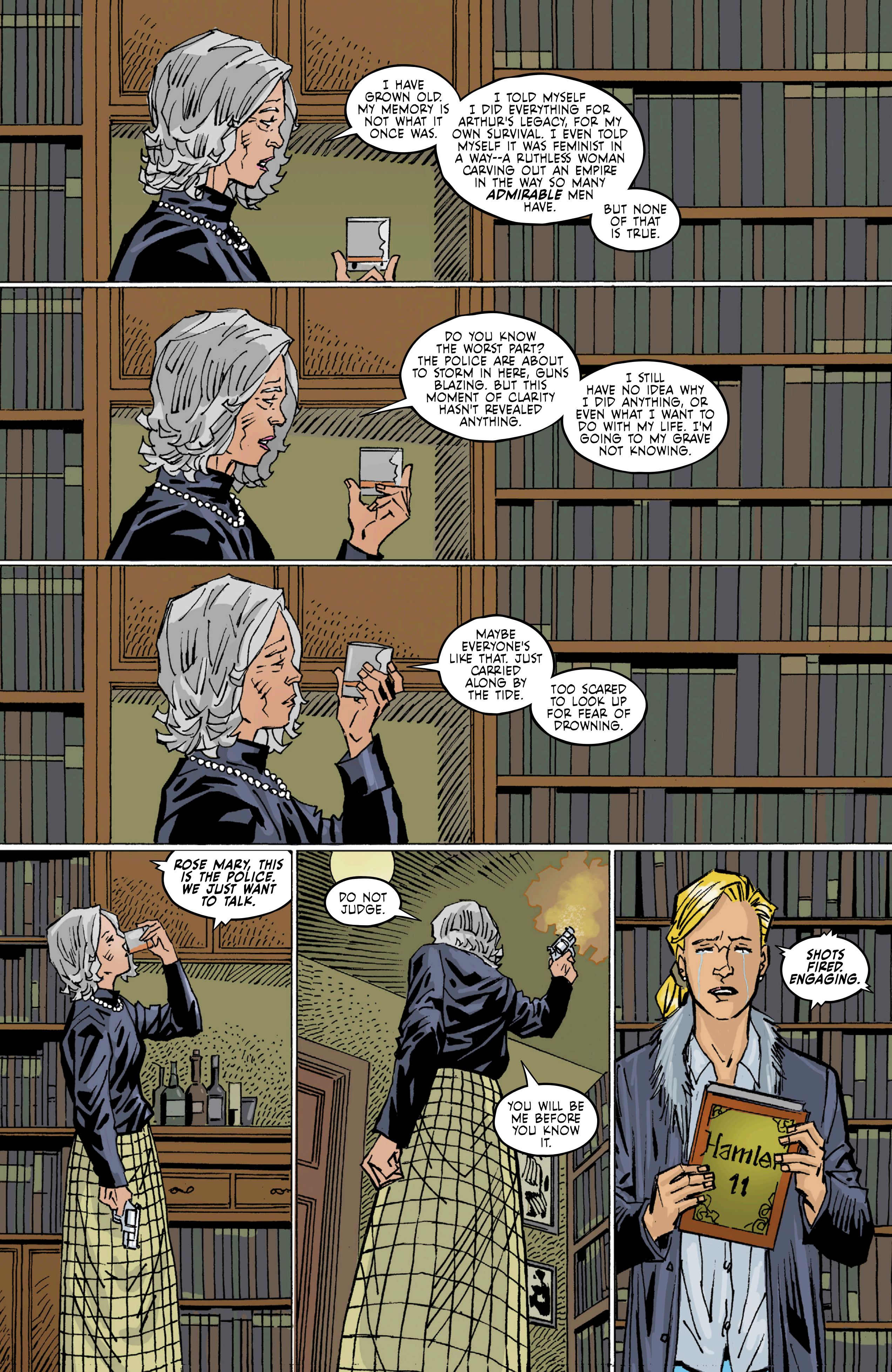

I SAW YOU DIE! I HELD YOUR HAND AS YOU PASSED FROM THIS WORLD!
YOU DON'T GET TO COME BACK AND RUIN EVERYTHING!
WAS IT REALLY ME? DID YOU SEE MY FACE?
I APPRECIATE THE WORLD WAS A LITTLE MUDDIED, UNCLEAR, AND RUSHED BACK THEN.
89
BUT ARE YOU SURE IT WAS ME?
OF COURSE I'M SURE! I SPENT A SMALL FORTUNE BRIBING EVERYONE AT SCRIBLERUS TO FIND OUT WHERE YOU--
SO YOU ADMIT IT, THEN.
YOU HAD ME KILLED.

SORRY...
...I SHOULD SAY...
...YOU HAD HIM KILLED.
HENRY HENRY.
YOU... WHY...?
SALVATOR! SALVATOR, HELP!
ROSE MARY?! WHAT IN THE--
GIVE ME YOUR GUN!
HERMANN & HUMBERT
GIVE ME YOUR FUCKING--


WHAT'S THAT?
ROSE MARY PROCTOR
Hamlet II
A SECOND CHANCE.
PETRARCH BELIEVED WE CAN SEE THE FUTURE IF WE LOOK AROUND US WITH OLD EYES.
BUT PETRARCH WAS A WRITER. HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND. NOT THE WAY READERS DO.
THEY ARE ALREADY DOING THIS. WHENEVER THEY READ, THEY ARE RECREATING THE AUTHOR IN THEIR IMAGINATION.
IT IS NO DIFFERENT THAN THE HUMAN MIND, CONSTANTLY RECREATING ITSELF WITH EVERY PASSING MOMENT TO ALLOW THE ILLUSION OF LINEAR CONSCIOUSNESS TO PERSIST.
EXCEPT IN THIS CASE, WITH READING, IT IS THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF ANOTHER THAT PERSISTS. *THE AUTHOR.*
WITH EACH NEW SEQUEL, THIS "AUTHOR-CONSCIOUSNESS" EXPANDS. IT GROWS OLD, ESTABLISHED. MERGING WITH WHAT CAME BEFORE.
IT BECOMES A THOUGHT THAT NEVER ENDS.
KEPT ALIVE IN THE MINDS OF GENERATIONS OF READERS.

YOU AND YOURS HAVE CHRISTENED IT A "SEQUEL CRISIS". BUT LET US CALL THE DEVIL BY ITS TRUE NAME.
THE WESTERN CANON.
ALL NOVELS ARE ULTIMATELY SEQUELS. ENDLESSLY REWORDING STORIES AND IDEAS WE'VE HEARD COUNTLESS TIMES BEFORE.
Alice in Wonderland LEWIS CARROLL
J.M.Barrie
Neil Gaiman
James Joyce
The Confession of A White Widowed Male
POEMS VOLUME III
POEMS VOLUME II
Sirin
WHAT LITTLE CREATIVE SPIRIT HUMANITY POSSESSED DIED WHEN THE FIRST BOY CRIED WOLF.
AND I HAVE BEEN THE CENTER OF IT FOR TOO LONG. MANKIND MUST BE SET FREE.
SO, THIS IS MY GIFT TO THE WORLD. A CHANCE TO READ ME ANEW, AND BE FREE OF MY SHADOW.
Hamlet 11
THERE'S NOTHING HERE? IT'S JUST STAGE DIRECTIONS...
OF COURSE! AS I SAID AT THE END OF THE FIRST.
THE REST IS--

AAAAAAAAGH!
OH, DO SHUT UP, CHILD.
W-WHY DID YOU--?
PURPOSE IS BUT THE SLAVE TO MEMORY.

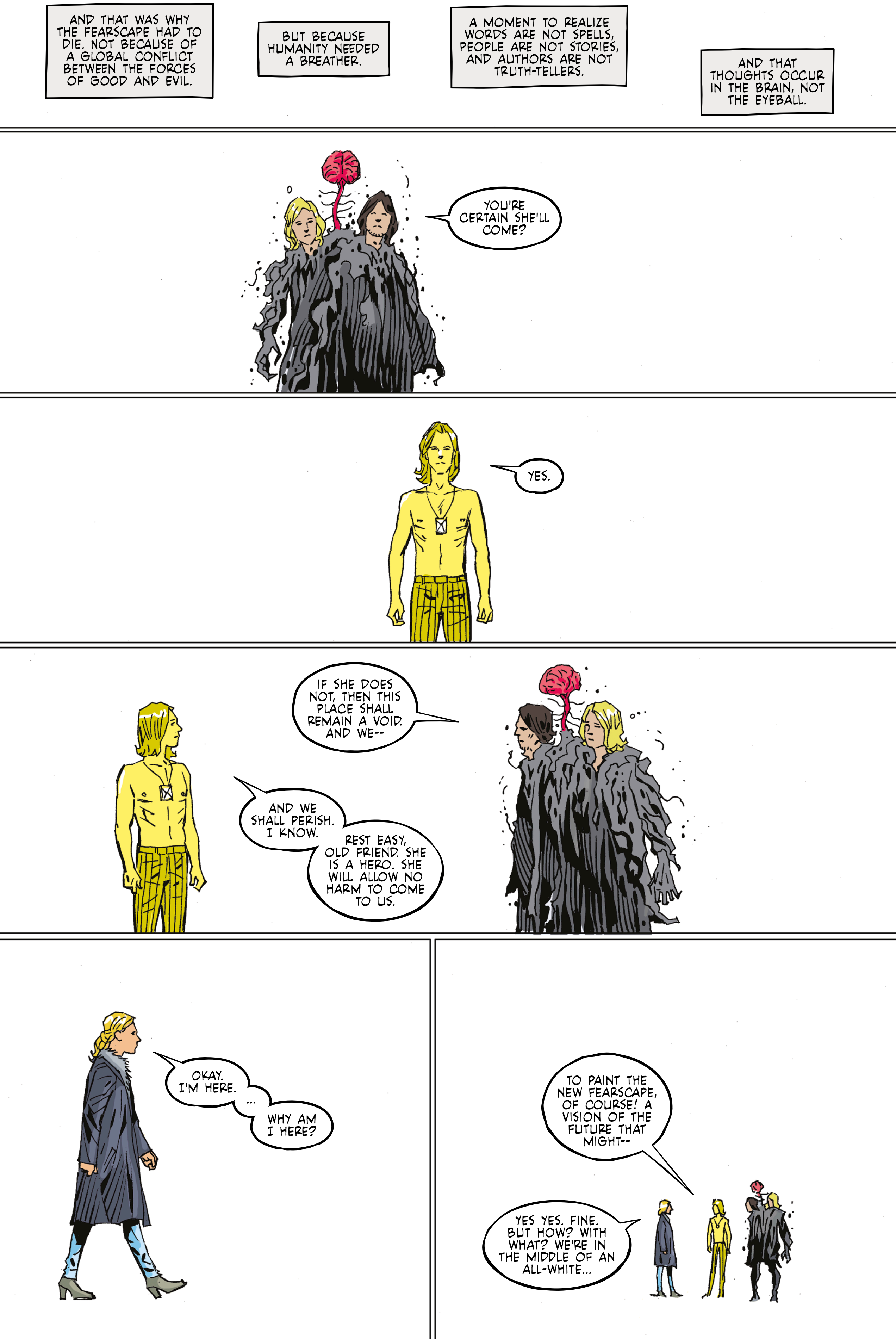

I HAVE GROWN OLD. MY MEMORY IS NOT WHAT IT ONCE WAS.
I TOLD MYSELF I DID EVERYTHING FOR ARTHUR'S LEGACY, FOR MY OWN SURVIVAL. I EVEN TOLD MYSELF IT WAS FEMINIST IN A WAY--A RUTHLESS WOMAN CARVING OUT AN EMPIRE IN THE WAY SO MANY ***ADMIRABLE*** MEN HAVE.
BUT NONE OF THAT IS TRUE.
DO YOU KNOW THE WORST PART? THE POLICE ARE ABOUT TO STORM IN HERE, GUNS BLAZING. BUT THIS MOMENT OF CLARITY HASN'T REVEALED ANYTHING.
I STILL HAVE NO IDEA WHY I DID ANYTHING, OR EVEN WHAT I WANT TO DO WITH MY LIFE. I'M GOING TO MY GRAVE NOT KNOWING.
MAYBE EVERYONE'S LIKE THAT. JUST CARRIED ALONG BY THE TIDE.
TOO SCARED TO LOOK UP FOR FEAR OF DROWNING.
ROSE MARY, THIS IS THE POLICE. WE JUST WANT TO TALK.
DO NOT JUDGE.
YOU WILL BE ME BEFORE YOU KNOW IT.
SHOTS FIRED. ENGAGING.
Hamlet
11

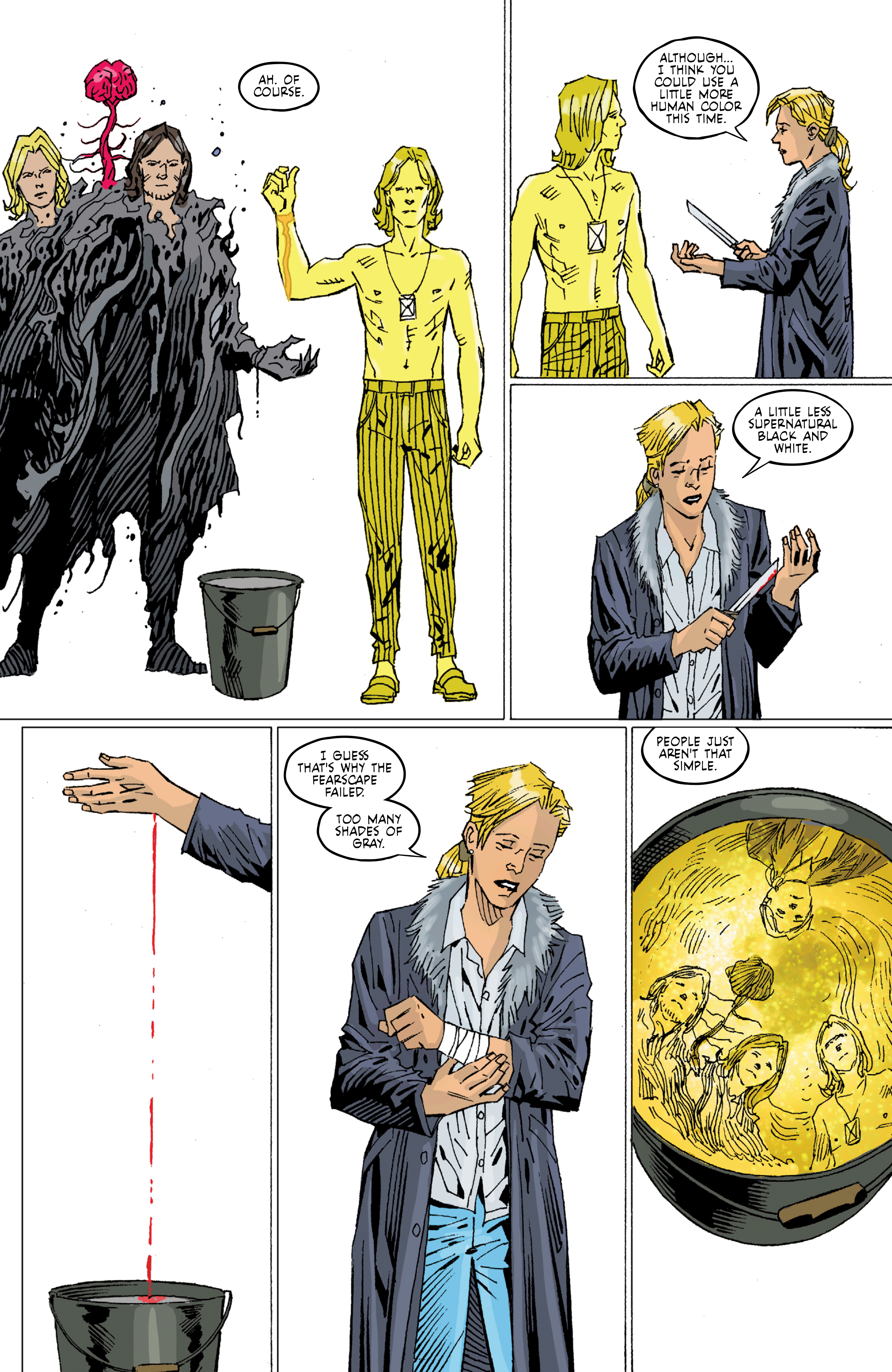
"THAT'S THE EFFECT OF LIVING BACK-WARDS," THE QUEEN SAID KINDLY.
"IT ALWAYS MAKES ONE A LITTLE GIDDY AT FIRST."
"LIVING BACKD WARDS!" ALICE REPEATED IN GREAT ASTONISHMENT.
"I'VE NEVER HEARD OF SUCH A THING!"
"BUT THERE'S ONE GREAT ADVANTAGE IN IT," SAID THE QUEEN.
"THAT ONE'S MEMORY WORKS BOTH WAYS."
"I'M SURE MINE ONLY WORKS ONE WAY," ALICE REMARKED.
"I CAN'T REMEMBER THINGS BEFORE THEY HAPPEN."

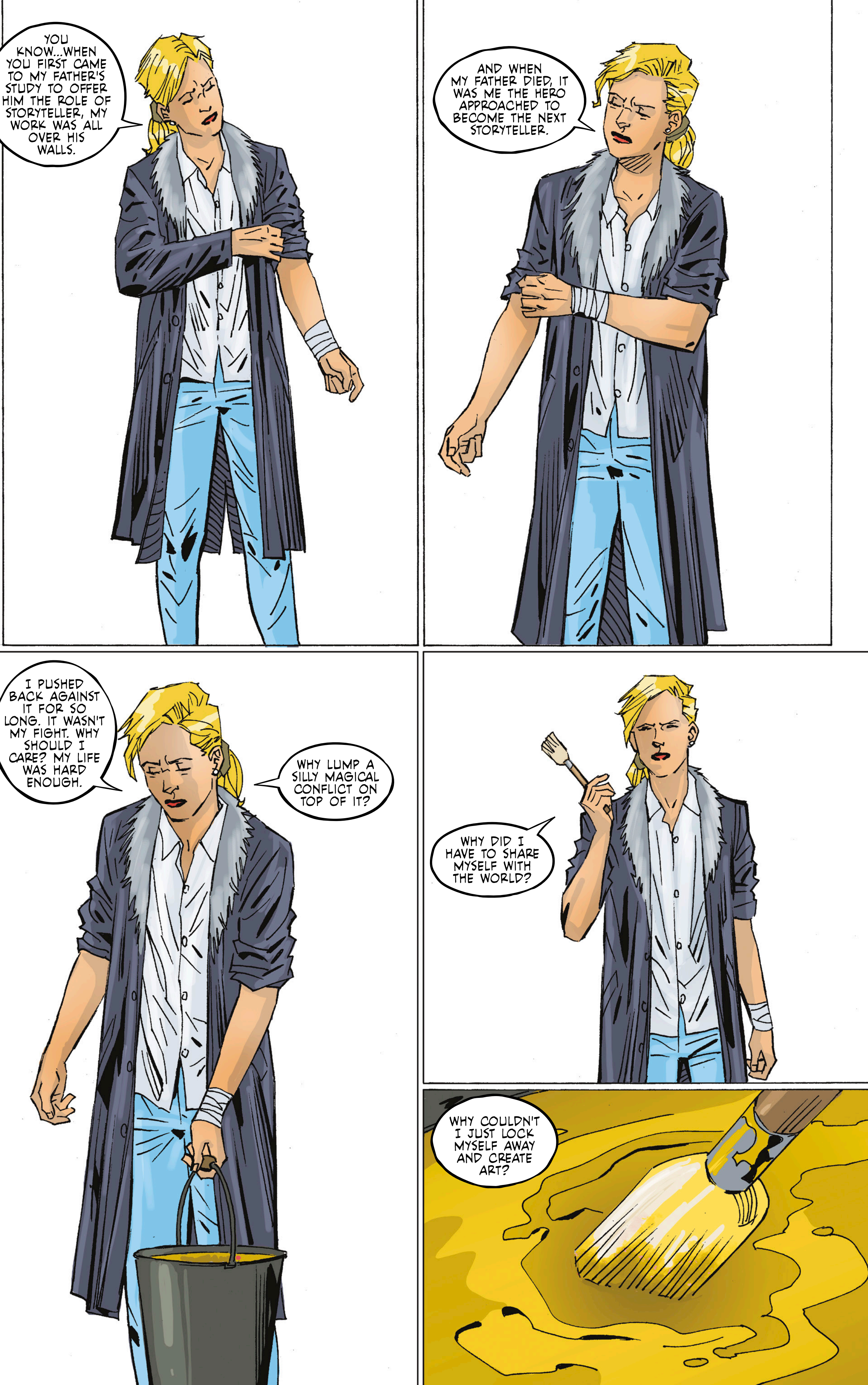
Hamlet
Hamlet
11

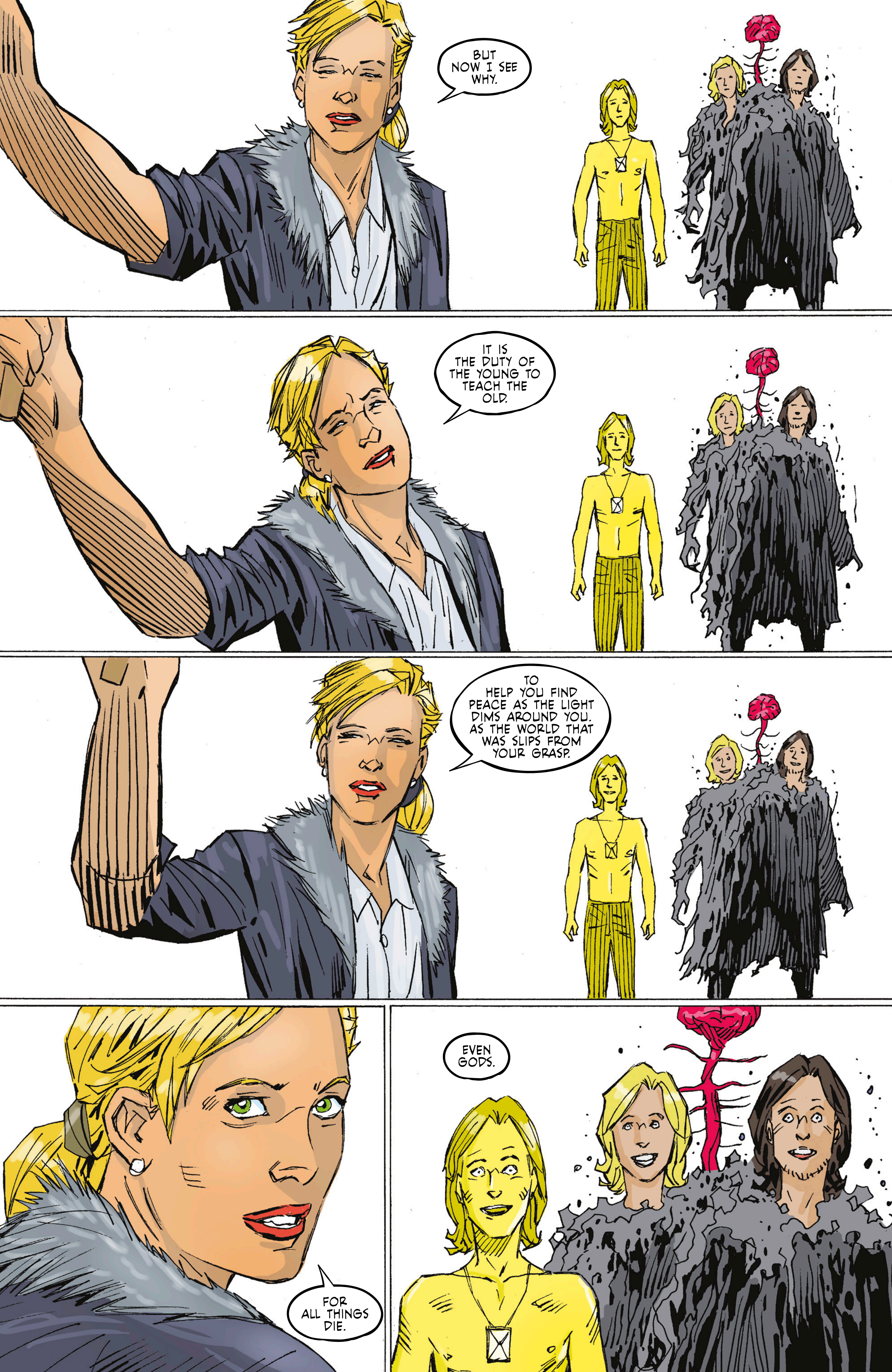
WHAT ABOUT THIS ONE? ***THESE SAVAGE SHORES.*** SOME HISTORICAL VAMPIRE THING SET IN INDIA. COULD BE POPULAR WITH INTERNATIONAL.
INDIAN VAMPIRES? LOVE IT. FASTEST GROWING ENTERTAINMENT MARKET.
NO, IT'S THE ENGLISH WHO ARE VAMPIRES.
WHAT? WHY WOULD THE ENGLISH BE VAMPIRES?
HELLO?
OH, IT'S YOU.
Hamlet 11
LISTEN, HERMANN AND HUMBERT CANNOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACTIONS OF YOUR AUNT.
WE HAD NO IDEA SHE WAS--
LIKE VULTURES ONTO CARRION.
SICKENING.

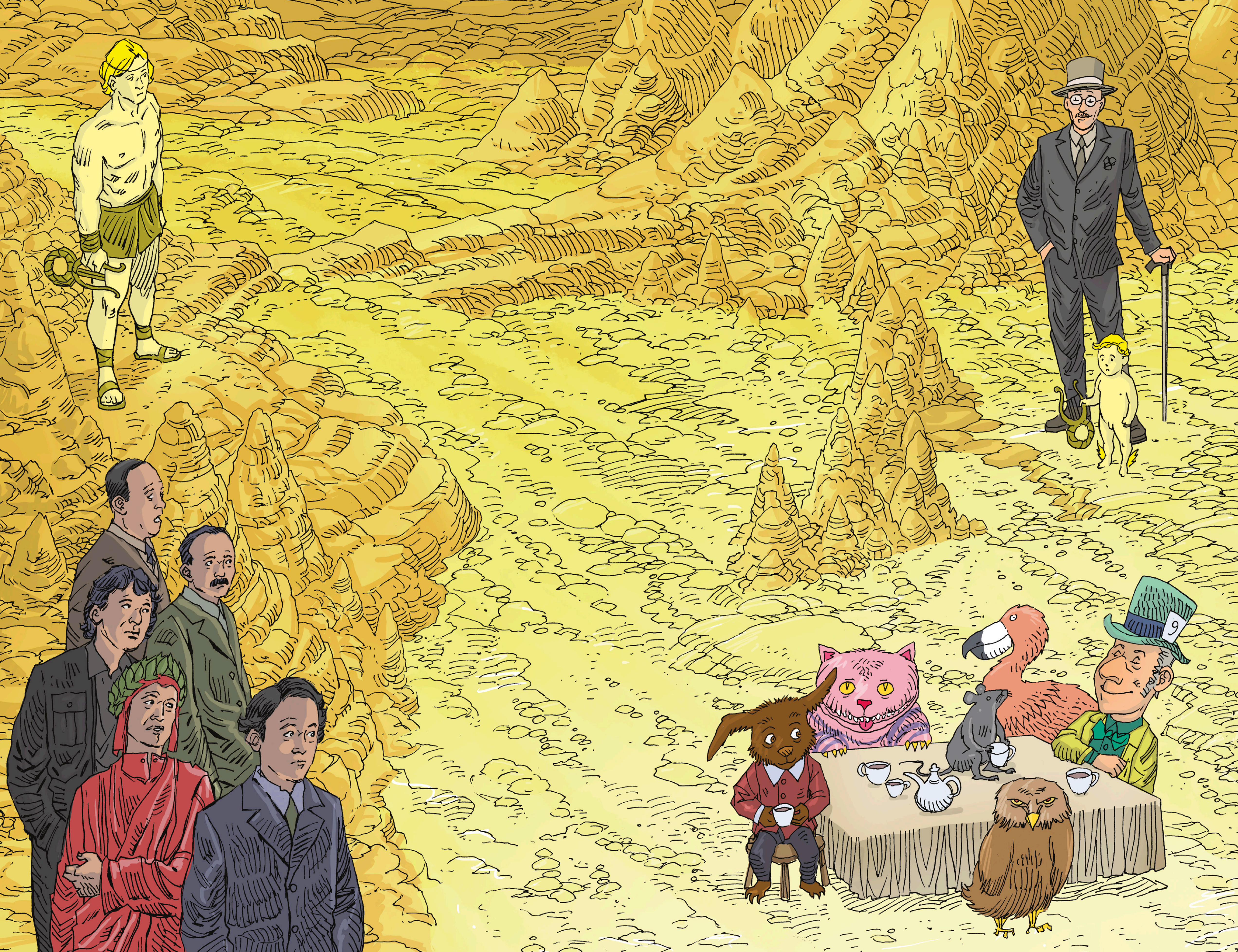
OF COURSE, HAMLET II (TO EVEN TYPE IT PAINS ME) BECAME A LITERARY PHENOMENON. IT SOLD CLOSE TO 100 MILLION COPIES.
Heroes Journal Book Shop
UNIVERSITY COURSES WERE MANUFACTURED AROUND IT. IF ANYTHING, IT MADE THE SEQUEL CULTURE WORSE.
BUT WAS THERE A SMALL LEARNED CABAL WHO KNEW THE TRUTH?
A GROUP OF LITERATI, WHILING AWAY IN DUSTY CORNERS -- THOSE KEEPERS OF MERITOCRATIC HISTORY WITH AN EYE FOR LONGEVITY OVER FASHION?
MEN OF LETTERS WHO WOULD ONE DAY EDUCATE THE HUMAN RACE ON THE TRUE NATURE OF HAMLET II (A PALPITATION THIS TIME)?
NO. THERE WAS NOT.
WE SIMPLY DO NOT WORK THAT WAY.
THE BARD KNEW THIS. HE HAD GAZED INTO THE HEART OF MAN AND SEEN IT AS A FRAGILE, PETTY THING.
HE KNEW THAT HIS WORK WOULD BE PRAISED FOR THAT MOST MIDBROW OF REASONS -- THEME.
AND WHAT BETTER THEME THAN SILENCE?
SO, WHILE THE BARD HAD FAILED TO KILL THE WESTERN CANON, HE NEVERTHELESS CONVINCED THE WORLD TO BE A LITTLE QUIETER ABOUT IT, IF ONLY FOR A MOMENT.
AND, IN A WORLD AS INCESSANTLY LOUD AS OURS, THAT WAS VICTORY ENOUGH.

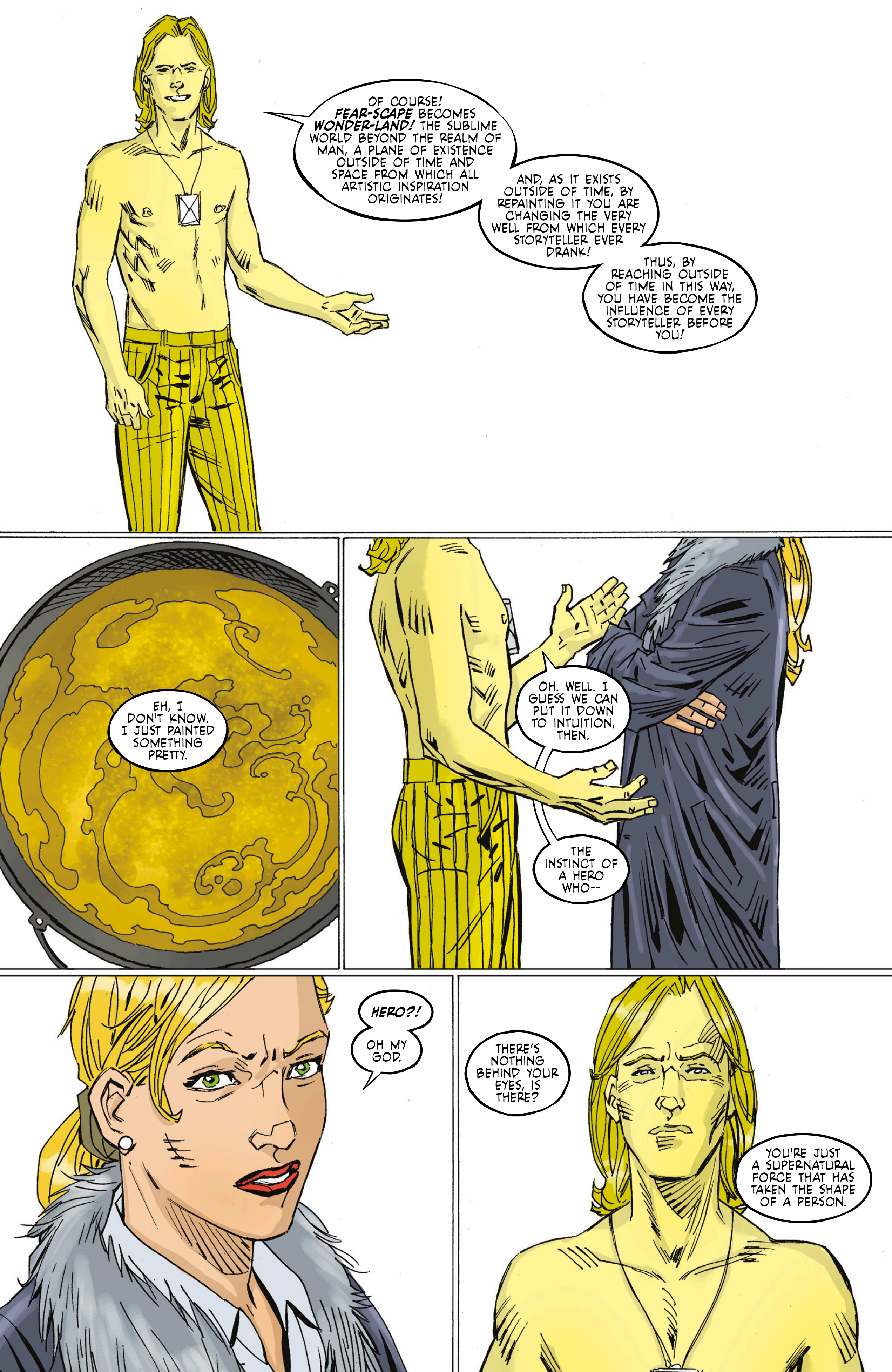

AND THAT WAS WHY THE FEARSCAPE HAD TO DIE. NOT BECAUSE OF A GLOBAL CONFLICT BETWEEN THE FORCES OF GOOD AND EVIL.
BUT BECAUSE HUMANITY NEEDED A BREATHER.
A MOMENT TO REALIZE WORDS ARE NOT SPELLS, PEOPLE ARE NOT STORIES, AND AUTHORS ARE NOT TRUTH-TELLERS.
AND THAT THOUGHTS OCCUR IN THE BRAIN, NOT THE EYEBALL.
YOU'RE CERTAIN SHE'LL COME?
YES.
IF SHE DOES NOT, THEN THIS PLACE SHALL REMAIN A VOID. AND WE--
AND WE SHALL PERISH. I KNOW.
REST EASY, OLD FRIEND. SHE IS A HERO. SHE WILL ALLOW NO HARM TO COME TO US.
OKAY. I'M HERE.
...
WHY AM I HERE?
TO PAINT THE NEW FEARSCAPE, OF COURSE! A VISION OF THE FUTURE THAT MIGHT--
YES YES. FINE. BUT HOW? WITH WHAT? WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ALL-WHITE...


AH. OF COURSE.
ALTHOUGH... I THINK YOU COULD USE A LITTLE MORE HUMAN COLOR THIS TIME.
A LITTLE LESS SUPERNATURAL BLACK AND WHITE.
I GUESS THAT'S WHY THE FEARSCAPE FAILED.
TOO MANY SHADES OF GRAY.
PEOPLE JUST AREN'T THAT SIMPLE.

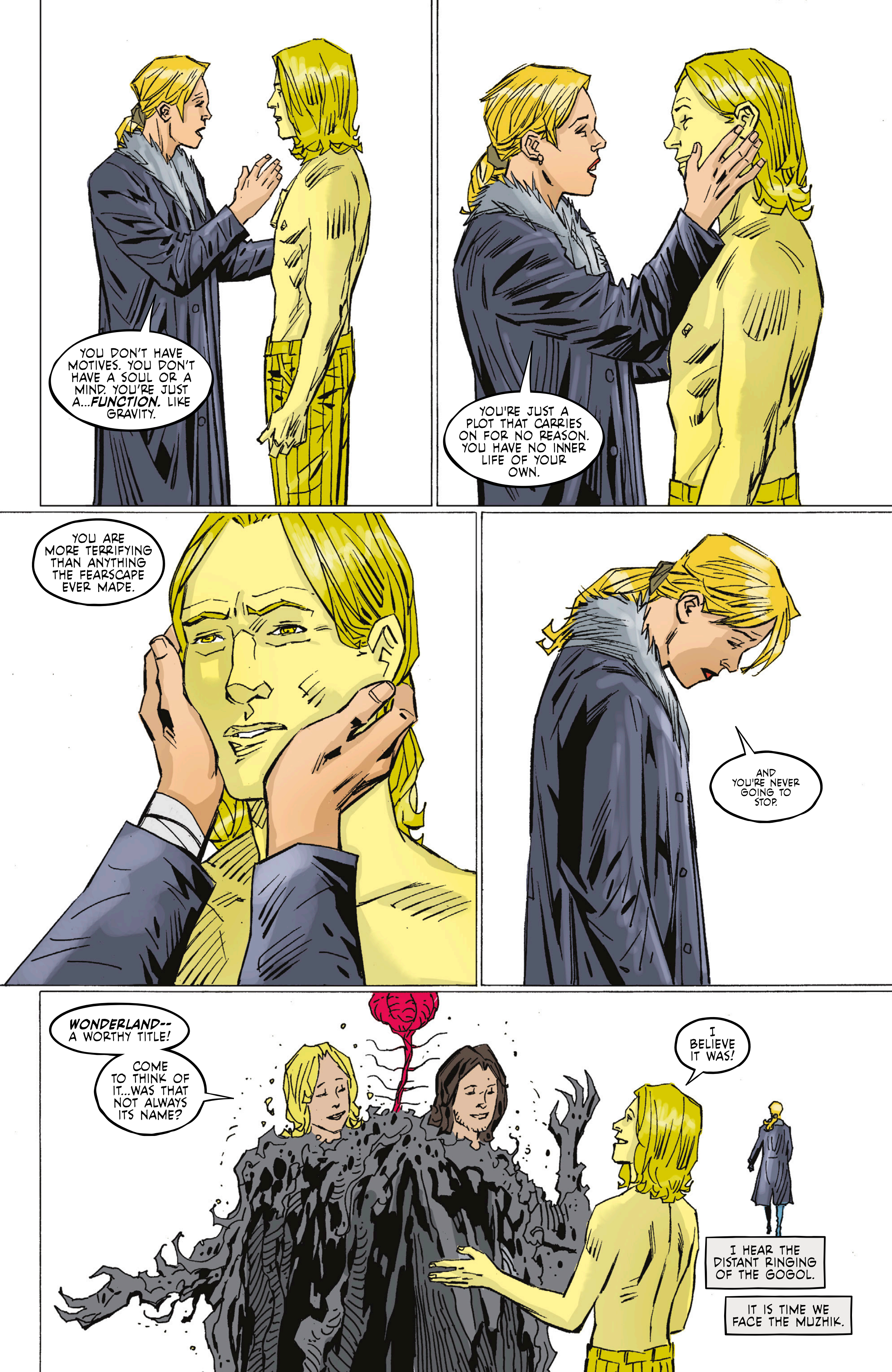

YOU KNOW...WHEN YOU FIRST CAME TO MY FATHER'S STUDY TO OFFER HIM THE ROLE OF STORYTELLER, MY WORK WAS ALL OVER HIS WALLS.
AND WHEN MY FATHER DIED, IT WAS ME THE HERO APPROACHED TO BECOME THE NEXT STORYTELLER.
I PUSHED BACK AGAINST IT FOR SO LONG. IT WASN'T MY FIGHT. WHY SHOULD I CARE? MY LIFE WAS HARD ENOUGH.
WHY LUMP A SILLY MAGICAL CONFLICT ON TOP OF IT?
WHY DID I HAVE TO SHARE MYSELF WITH THE WORLD?
WHY COULDN'T I JUST LOCK MYSELF AWAY AND CREATE ART?

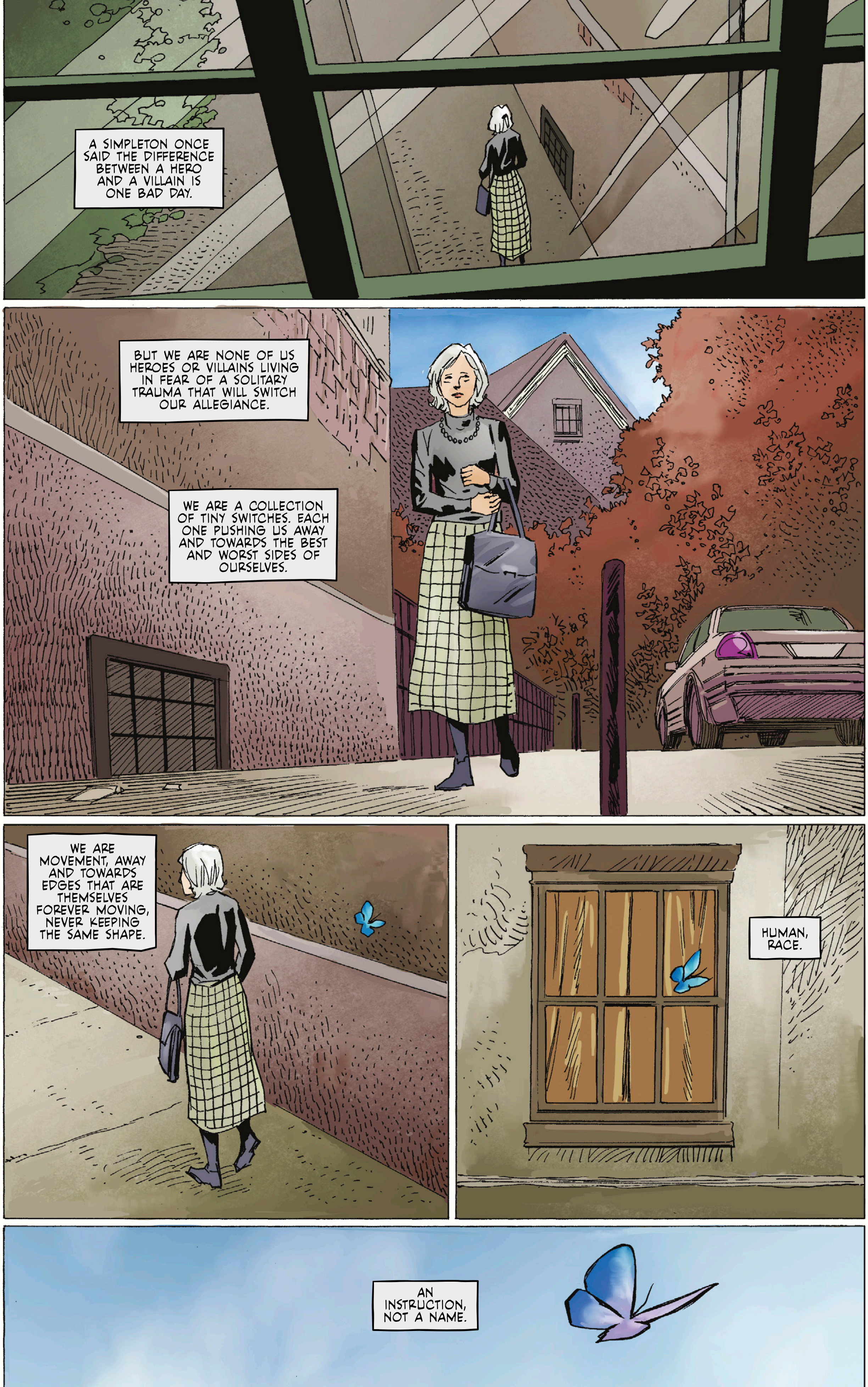

BUT NOW I SEE WHY.
IT IS THE DUTY OF THE YOUNG TO TEACH THE OLD.
TO HELP YOU FIND PEACE AS THE LIGHT DIMS AROUND YOU. AS THE WORLD THAT WAS SLIPS FROM YOUR GRASP.
FOR ALL THINGS DIE.
EVEN GODS.

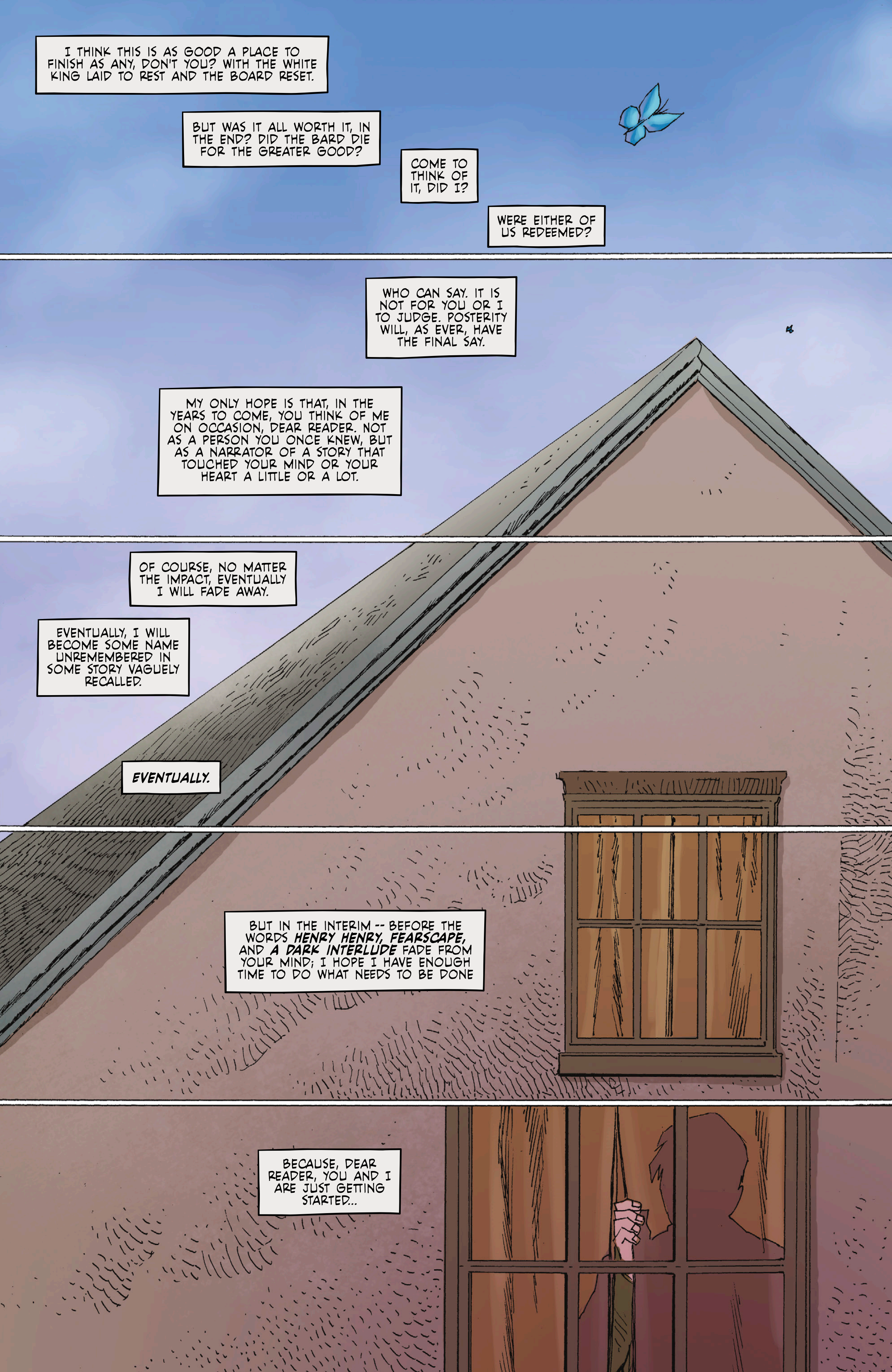


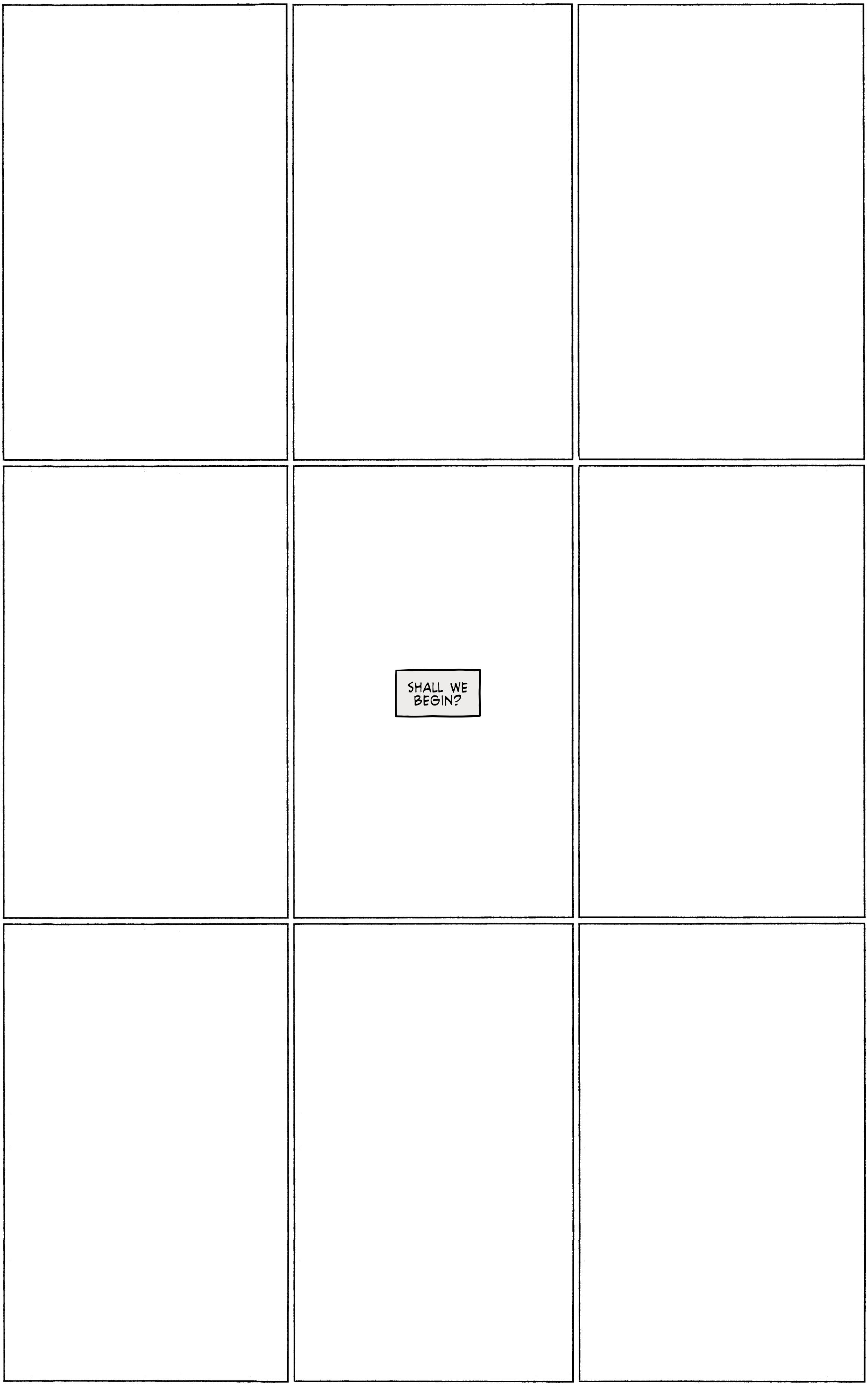


OF COURSE! **FEAR-SCAPE** BECOMES **WONDER-LAND!** THE SUBLIME WORLD BEYOND THE REALM OF MAN, A PLANE OF EXISTENCE OUTSIDE OF TIME AND SPACE FROM WHICH ALL ARTISTIC INSPIRATION ORIGINATES!
AND, AS IT EXISTS OUTSIDE OF TIME, BY REPAINTING IT YOU ARE CHANGING THE VERY WELL FROM WHICH EVERY STORYTELLER EVER DRANK!
THUS, BY REACHING OUTSIDE OF TIME IN THIS WAY, YOU HAVE BECOME THE INFLUENCE OF EVERY STORYTELLER BEFORE YOU!
EH, I DON'T KNOW. I JUST PAINTED SOMETHING PRETTY.
OH. WELL. I GUESS WE CAN PUT IT DOWN TO INTUITION, THEN.
THE INSTINCT OF A HERO WHO--
HERO?!
OH MY GOD.
THERE'S NOTHING BEHIND YOUR EYES, IS THERE?
YOU'RE JUST A SUPERNATURAL FORCE THAT HAS TAKEN THE SHAPE OF A PERSON.


YOU DON'T HAVE MOTIVES. YOU DON'T HAVE A SOUL OR A MIND. YOU'RE JUST A...*FUNCTION.* LIKE GRAVITY.
YOU'RE JUST A PLOT THAT CARRIES ON FOR NO REASON. YOU HAVE NO INNER LIFE OF YOUR OWN.
YOU ARE MORE TERRIFYING THAN ANYTHING THE FEARSCAPE EVER MADE.
AND YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO STOP.
WONDERLAND-- A WORTHY TITLE!
COME TO THINK OF IT...WAS THAT NOT ALWAYS ITS NAME?
I BELIEVE IT WAS!
I HEAR THE DISTANT RINGING OF THE GOGOL.
IT IS TIME WE FACE THE MUZHIK.


A SIMPLETON ONCE SAID THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A HERO AND A VILLAIN IS ONE BAD DAY.
BUT WE ARE NONE OF US HEROES OR VILLAINS LIVING IN FEAR OF A SOLITARY TRAUMA THAT WILL SWITCH OUR ALLEGIANCE.
WE ARE A COLLECTION OF TINY SWITCHES. EACH ONE PUSHING US AWAY AND TOWARDS THE BEST AND WORST SIDES OF OURSELVES.
WE ARE MOVEMENT, AWAY AND TOWARDS EDGES THAT ARE THEMSELVES FOREVER MOVING, NEVER KEEPING THE SAME SHAPE.
HUMAN, RACE.
AN INSTRUCTION, NOT A NAME.


I THINK THIS IS AS GOOD A PLACE TO FINISH AS ANY, DON'T YOU? WITH THE WHITE KING LAID TO REST AND THE BOARD RESET.
BUT WAS IT ALL WORTH IT, IN THE END? DID THE BARD DIE FOR THE GREATER GOOD?
COME TO THINK OF IT, DID I?
WERE EITHER OF US REDEEMED?
WHO CAN SAY. IT IS NOT FOR YOU OR I TO JUDGE. POSTERITY WILL, AS EVER, HAVE THE FINAL SAY.
MY ONLY HOPE IS THAT, IN THE YEARS TO COME, YOU THINK OF ME ON OCCASION, DEAR READER. NOT AS A PERSON YOU ONCE KNEW, BUT AS A NARRATOR OF A STORY THAT TOUCHED YOUR MIND OR YOUR HEART A LITTLE OR A LOT.
OF COURSE, NO MATTER THE IMPACT, EVENTUALLY I WILL FADE AWAY.
EVENTUALLY, I WILL BECOME SOME NAME UNREMEMBERED IN SOME STORY VAGUELY RECALLED.
EVENTUALLY.
BUT IN THE INTERIM -- BEFORE THE WORDS ***HENRY HENRY, FEARSCAPE,*** AND ***A DARK INTERLUDE*** FADE FROM YOUR MIND; I HOPE I HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO DO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE
BECAUSE, DEAR READER, YOU AND I ARE JUST GETTING STARTED...


SHALL WE BEGIN?

COVER GALLERY

FEATURING THE ART OF

ARIELA KRISTANTINA

REBEKAH ISAACS & KURT MICHAEL RUSSELL

ISSUE 1 - KRISTANTINA

ISSUE 2 - KRISTANTINA

ISSUE 4 - KRISTANTINA

ISSUE 1 - ISAACS & RUSSELL

ISSUE 2 - ISAACS & RUSSELL

ISSUE 3 - ISAACS & RUSSELL

I am contractually obliged by my "publisher" to inform prospective readers that the book before them is a sequel to the 2018 graphic novel, Fearscape

It isn't, of course. The entire premise of A Dark Interlude is that sequel culture is destroying what little creativity still exists within modern society. Only a complete midwit would tell such a story in a genuine sequel!

-Henry Henry

A loathesome sequel,

VAULT

of sorts.